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De/Reconstructing the Other in the Work of Coco Fusco

by

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Abstract

Coco Fusco is a writer, performance artist, and associate professor in the Visual Arts Program, School of the Arts, Columbia University. Her various publications, lectures, and performance pieces examine the effect of hegemonic discourse upon the appearance of the non-white body in contemporary representation. By examining three of Fusco's pieces, *Two Amerindians Visit the West*, *Better Yet When Dead*, and *The Incredible Disappearing Woman*, this thesis demonstrates how Fusco's post-colonial performance is an effective agent of political resistance. Her work remains testament to the ways in which theatrical representation can expose violent exercises of power over the 'other-ed' body, and in so doing, alter perceptions associated with structures of power.

Dedication

To my husband, Marcel Romanick, for his love and encouragement.

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Locating Coco Fusco

In her essay, "Witness For The Prosecution", writer/critic Jean Fisher asserts, "Coco Fusco's work overall stands as both an extension and a corrective of earlier postmodernist and postcolonial theory, where what is at stake is a concept of the subject as an effective agent of political engagement and resistance" (*The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* 224[1]). Here, Fisher speaks of a theatre artist whose contributions to subversive theory and practice demonstrate a particular clarity and integrity. Coco Fusco's work explores contemporary representations of cultural identities examining the inscription of stereotypes upon particular bodies. Fusco's work is post-colonial as it undermines discourses shaped by a history of epistemic violence and discursive practice which have constructed notions of the 'other'. She is particularly concerned with the plight of the "subaltern body" (*Bodies* xvi) in our postmodern era of consumption and intercultural exchange. Her performance installations-- her fictional renderings that expose instances of hegemonic discourse in practice-- position her body both as the object of a marginalizing gaze and as the site of political resistance and change. This thesis will demonstrate how Fusco's post-colonial performance is a testament to the ways in which theatrical representation can expose "the illegitimately violent exercise of power over bodies" (*Corpus Delecti* 2), and in so doing, alter perceptions associated with hegemonic structures of power.

Having already introduced a few specific concepts, I will pause briefly to define and clarify them. In regards to Fusco's work, the 'subaltern' is the non-white body who, having roots in or having been assimilated by the processes of colonialism, is identified by imperialist perceptions as 'other'. Gayatri Spivak has stated, "the 'subaltern' cannot appear without the thought of the 'elite'" (*In Other Worlds* 203), and the existence of the

subaltern identity is therefore symptomatic of the persistence of imperialist hegemony and not definitive of a material reality. Imperialism, a corollary of capitalist patriarchy, has helped to shape the 'centre' and 'periphery'[2]. I adopt theorist Rosemary Hennessey's understanding of capitalist patriarchy to assume that the centre guarantees its position by "organizing hegemonic meaning through the articulation of several axes of difference: racial, gendered, sexual" (23). This process of creating meaning through difference positions the subaltern as the Abject[3]: "that which is expelled from the identity as an unrepresentable excess or remainder that nonetheless haunts the ego and its fears and fantasies"[4] (Mercer 4). I locate demonstrative sexual behaviour, primordial savagery, and unexplainable mysticism as types of that excess, and define the process of abjection, therefore, as assuming particular bodies to naturally possess such qualities. In the context of Fusco's efforts then, the subaltern is the exotic object of desire and consumption for the Western gaze; it is the identity given the non-white body through a process of constant surveillance and abjection.

Coco Fusco is a writer, performance artist, and associate professor in the Visual Arts Program, School of the Arts, Columbia University. Her major publications include *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (author, The New Press 1995), *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (editor, Routledge 1999) and the *The Bodies that Were not Ours and Other Writings* (author, Routledge/inIVA 2001). Fusco's essays have appeared in numerous publications[5], including *The Village Voice*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Nation*, and *Art in America*. Her media/performance projects, lecture sessions and curatorial projects have been received worldwide, throughout North and South America, Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Korea and Japan[6]. Since 1990, Fusco has been creating performance installations based on

her observations on how cultural and social power dynamics construct contemporary notions of self and other.

In the introduction to *English is Broken Here*, Fusco's reflections on her childhood provide insight into her current preoccupations[7]. Fusco, born in New York to a white American father and an exiled Cuban mother, has identified herself as a child initially ambivalent to the circumstances of her own heritage. For Fusco, growing up in New York provided a social freedom she could not identify in the traditions of the Latin Catholic culture in which her mother was raised. She viewed her environment as one of tolerance; one which provided fewer restrictions on the young and on women, and she favoured things "American" (vii) by association with that freedom. Her mixed background seemed of little consequence or impediment to her experience of the world. She reflects, "Like most immigrant kids, we slid into the gap between languages and cultures with ease. The world around us was already communicating to us that we were better than our relatives because we had English under our belts" (vii). As she grew, however, Fusco realized that such an advantage was illusory; her childhood situation was in fact separate from a larger picture in which difference, while acceptable, was inextricably marginalizing in its association with race. She states,

> In the 1970s [my appearance] was always a losing proposition for me, since I didn't look oppressed enough for white liberals or black enough for cult nats. I just signaled confusion for most back then. I could not have predicted that the political and cultural shift of the 1980s would thrust me into a world of hybrids and clashing signals that, with the passing of each year, was becoming more uncannily reminiscent of the one in which I had begun. (ix)

In the late 1970s, the *diálogo* between Cuban exiles and nationals provided the kind of political and cultural shift to which Fusco refers. During this time, many Cubans, including Fusco's mother and relatives, returned to revisit their 'homeland'. The exodus known as the Mariel boat lift in 1980 also brought, along with the thousands of other refugees to the Florida shores, relatives Fusco had never seen. And while family reunion and celebration were a result of this *diálogo,* families were also torn apart as the American Government began campaigns to suppress leftist insurrection in Central America[8]. Fusco's brother was one of the many Latino boys scouted by the US government to battle the 'Red Menace'. His death during service in 1984 was particularly devastating for Fusco: "It shook me to the bone to face my participation in the cynical game that used affirmative-action success stories as window dressing while turning the less fortunate into cannon fodder" (*English Is* x). Faced personally with the consequences of political power games, and realizing their impact upon the realities of people distanced from her by geographic location and circumstance, Fusco began to understand that she too was implicated in the perpetuation of an epistemic violence.

These experiences provoked Fusco's exploration of the repercussions of unequal power dynamics in intercultural exchange. She states, "I decided that I wanted to make sense out of the clashes between cultures that cause so many of us so much trouble and pain, but I chose to do so within the realm of art" (x). To this end, Fusco's efforts have developed into an attempt to create a representational space for the subaltern that has not been coopted by a hegemonic discourse. Her actions and opinions appear inflammatory within circles of academic criticism and debate: Fusco identifies a common perception of her by her contemporaries as "a politically correct hardliner" (*English Is* 66). These kinds of perceptions, however, do little to persuade Fusco to tolerate the status quo. She states,

> Postcolonially identified artists know very well what to avoid and take a strategic approach as to how they present themselves. . . . But some of them keep trying to go against the grain, to unleash the demons that others try vehemently to hide. Those are the people I like to write about the most. (*Bodies* xv)

Fusco exposes some of these 'demons' in her own writings, for example, the practice of tokenism[9] in art festivals, exhibitions and conferences, and what she perceives to be a growing reluctance among artists to consider the material conditions of the circumstances they choose to represent. She is particularly critical of "the postmodern fascination with the exchange of cultural property and with completely deracinated identity" (*English Is* 27). Her work confronts those who consider a decentralization of the sources of power (knowledge) and emerging audience reception theories to be evidence for the impossibility of cultural imperialism to exist as a current, operative condition. Livingstone A. White, in his essay "Reconsidering Cultural Imperialism" states that "with the advent of advanced communication technologies that allow for a multi-directional as opposed to a uni-directional flow of information between countries, cultural imperialism is no longer a useful [term]" (2). While I would concede that centuries of intercultural communication and recent technologically-aided exchange can refute the *violent* coercion implied by the term 'imperialism', the current material conditions Fusco exposes in her work suggest that such 'sharing' of culture takes place on a significantly disparate playing field. Her efforts are reactive to those who refuse to acknowledge that the West continues to dominate peripheral nations with opportunistic economic and political strategies.

Fusco examines the work of similarly focussed academics-- literary critic Hortense Spillers, theorists Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, and art historian Judith Wilson-- for

their ability to identify and expose the methods of production of a colonialist discourse within post-modernity (*Bodies*). She refers to the art installations of Andre Serrano, Ana Mendieta and Robbie MacCauley as examples of resistance against this discourse and observes that certain artists are deemed 'controversial' not because they do violence to society but because they resist their subaltern classifications. Fusco's interest and activities indicate she possesses both a discerning eye that can identify colonial discourse at its most subtle/insidious and a strong voice of protest which she raises for the unvoiced subaltern.

Fusco's academic titles include a Bachelor of Arts in Semiotics and Literature & Society, Brown University, 1982, and a Master of Arts in Modern Thought and Literature, Stanford, 1985. She began her history of performance installations and curatorial projects two years after completing her studies. Jean Fisher states, "Fusco was among a generation of cultural theorists and practitioners then emerging from an expanded field of post-colonial critique, bringing with them new paradigms of cultural politics developing in cross-border zones and post-national global networks" (223). In addition to her own writings and projects, many critics have attempted to analyze and categorize Fusco's efforts. Interviews with Fusco are found in publications such as *Colors: Minnesota's Journal of Opinion by Writers of Color*, *BOMB magazine*, and *New Art Examiner*. Articles on Fusco appear in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance Art*, *The Hour Weekly*, *The Drama Review* and *College Literature*. Yet despite the abundance of materials in which Fusco's name surfaces, there are surprisingly few publications that offer in- depth analyses of her work. Deemed "one of North America's leading cultural theorists and artists" (preface *Bodies*) Fusco contributes to her field "an impressive body of writing, distinct both in its attentiveness to the nuances of cultural context and in its

wide range of modalities: the scholarly and the conversational, the pedagogical, the diaristic and the performance script" (Fisher 226). As such, Fusco's performance pieces--her theory in practice-- warrant a careful analysis to exhibit just how subversive she is.

Fusco's work is an act of political resistance: she incorporates post-colonial theory with observations on material conditions to empower the subaltern female. She is a multidisciplinary artist who uses performance as "an arena for the constant process of renegotiating experiences and meaning that constitute culture" (Zarilli 16). This renegotiation is critical to her ability to position the subaltern outside a dominant reading, although for some theorists, it is an impossible task. *Women's Intercultural Performance* authors Holledge and Tompkins summarize discourse theorist Robert Young's contention: "it is impossible for a western audience to 'read' the 'raced' body without using the classification system that is deeply imbedded in Western discourse (Young 1995)" (113). While Young's observation is certainly informed by and mindful of the historical and social conditions in which prevailing discourses are constructed, his assertion also risks reaffirming the reification of the subaltern by assuming that alternatives for viewing the objectified bodies are 'impossible'. The 'inevitability' of a taxonomic classification of bodies and identities poses a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to intercultural representation. In opposition to this particularly bleak projection, I will argue that Coco Fusco's performance pieces resist being contained within a prevailing imperialist taxonomy. In general, this thesis will demonstrate Fusco's ability to create easily accessible performances which challenge discourses that surround the subaltern body.

Fusco's writings and performances are thus located at the crossroads of intercultural exchange, making her a more complex figure than either a coherent post-

colonial critic or a socially concerned performance artist. Fusco's shape-shifting lands her somewhere between dissident story-teller, compassionate eye, and trickster-figure, creating a presence in contemporary academic and theatrical circles which continually subverts marginalizing discourses. Fusco could be referring to her own aesthetic when she states, "Parody, satire, and carnivalesque unsettling of established orders continue to thrive as creative strategies for temporarily subverting authority" (*English Is* 36). Fusco examines the following: the containment of non-white cultures and bodies within the colonial gaze, the identities that are constructed and maintained by prevailing colonialist paradigms, and the representation of the 'other' in cultural and social spheres of influence. Her observations are expressed in interactive and inventive forums which frustrate attempts at assimilation and categorization.

To demonstrate the intention and impact of Fusco's oeuvre, I will examine three of her performance installations, beginning with one of her early efforts and concluding with her most recent work. The pieces *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992), *Better Yet When Dead* (1997), and *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* (2000) have been chosen in an effort to trace Fusco's evolving methodology as it plays out in her representation of subaltern bodies. I will attempt to show how Fusco's work effectively implicates her viewers in the discourse of power and control which fetishize and commodify the subaltern body. In the first of the three works, Fusco explores historical beginnings of the ongoing objectification of the non-white body. In the second piece she focuses on how this objectification constructs particular identities for 'celebrity' subalterns. Finally, her third piece proposes ultimate repercussions of that [mis]-representation in the new, virtual globe[10]. All of these pieces exhibit Fusco's signature aesthetic form, the diorama: a three dimensional simulation of a time/place/action

dissimilar from the environment it is staged within[11]. These dioramas will be explored for their ability to involve and implicate Fusco's audience in the issues she raises.

Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West is an examination of the historical and contemporary practices of containment and fetishization of the "primitive", non-white body. This piece, which displays two caged 'primitive bodies' was Fusco's attempt to present the public with an impromptu 'uncanny experience'. Fusco and her collaborator Guillermo Gómez-Peña dressed themselves as two natives from a previously undiscovered (fictional) Caribbean island and were presented in public enclosed within a ten by twelve foot cage. Using Freud's observations on the 'Uncanny' and Homi K. Bhabha's theories on the fetishization of the subaltern body, I will explore the ways in which Fusco has implicated her audience in her own observations on prevailing imperialist discourses. I will also discuss Bhabha's concept of the *Third Space* in relation to Fusco's ability to subvert a dominant reading of her installation by raising pertinent questions about the conditions of our post-colonial society.

Better Yet When Dead is an installation which explores Fusco's observations about the tendency to recognize women and their achievements only after they have died. In this piece, Fusco dressed as various deceased Latina celebrities, including Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, and Selena, and lay in coffin during a series of fictitous wakes for the prominent females. Fusco maintains that by forcing her audience to participate in a wake, an emotional and intellectual exploration of the issues she has identified resulted. Fusco's decision to represent the dead celebrities with her own body in an interactive forum is critical to her ability to foreground the issue of necrophilia as inherent in attitudes toward Latina femininity and creativity. Josette Féral's theories of performance have been useful to consider how the construction of the piece facilitates individual processes of meaning

making that implicate the spectator as voyeur, but also allow him/her to uncover Fusco's observation that "the rampant commodification of one's cultural heroes does not necessarily lead to gaining access to cultural resources for oneself or for one's community" (*Corpus Delecti* 30). *Better Yet When Dead* forces the audience to confront their complicity in revering constructed identities of Latina celebrities to the point that the women are indeed, 'better yet when dead'.

The Incredible Disappearing Woman, commissioned by the Portland Institute, is a play about women, sex and death in the US-Mexico border zone, based upon Fusco's several years of research about subaltern women in the global economy. It is Fusco's latest effort to create a space for the voice of the female subaltern worker who is subject to the consequences of an expanding world market and a simultaneously shrinking globe. The play is built around a dioramic exhibition which displays the desecration of a female Mexican corpse as 'art'. For this play, I offer a close reading, engaging in a marxist-feminist analysis to explore Fusco's perceptions on the fetishization and commodification of subaltern females in the virtual globe. With *The Incredible Disappearing Woman,* Fusco shows how the digital revolution positions the subaltern body in a dual, contradictory role. While women are highly visible in mass media representation as virtual objects of lust and desire, the material conditions of the new age position them simultaneously as the 'disappeared'-- the 'invisible'-- in regards to considerations of human rights and dignities. Fusco's multi-media aesthetic helps her to reposition her female subjects outside a dominant reading/gaze and ultimately subverts the traditional positioning of the subaltern body.

Fusco's situation is one of ongoing struggle within academic and artistic spheres of influence to retain her voice for the subaltern above a clamour which celebrates current

representation and token subaltern successes. For Fusco, such achievements cannot be viewed as *coup d'etat* against an insidious imperialist discourse. She states: "We didn't theorize postcoloniality after the fact, learn about it from a workshop, or wait for multiculturalism to become foundation lingo for 'appreciating diversity'-- we lived it and still struggle to make art about it" (*English Is* x). As Fisher notes, "The turbulence created by [Fusco's] work testifies to the extent to which the collective unconscious of the cultural field remains inscribed by a psychic investment originating in colonial relations" (223). Fusco's work is of crucial significance, then, in the wake of recent globalizing efforts which claim an emancipatory effect by whitewashing increasingly disparate material conditions between those with access to hegemonic structures of power and those without. I hope to offer a critical analysis of the work of this important activist in order to recognize her efforts and demonstrate how theatrical performance has the power to intervene in practices of destructive cultural myth-making.

Notes

[1] Coco Fusco, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 224. For simplicity in citing, *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings* will henceforth be referred to as *Bodies*.

[2] Rosemary Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 23.

I agree with Hennessey's understanding of patriarchy: it "refers to the structuring of social life-- labor, state, and consciousness-- such that more social resources and value accrue to men as a group at the expense of women as a group" .

[3] Kristeva's primary work on this term positions the Abject as neither object nor subject. Kristeva explains "by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism" (12). For the individual, the abject is created in the moment he/she realizes that 'me' is separate from (m)other' (just before an individual enters into Lacan's Symbolic). The abject therefore has to do with "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

[4] Kobena Mercer, "What Did Hybridity Do?" Interview with Handwerker Gallery. *Handwerker Gallery Newsletter*. 1.4 (Winter 1999-2000). <www.ithaca.edu/handwerker/news/200001/ hybridity.htm>. I adopt Mercer's definition of the Abject as it was identified in the interview.

[5] Other publications include *Frieze, Third Text, The Thing.net* and *Nka: Journal of African Art*. Her essays also appear in a number of anthologies.

[6] Media/Performance Projects: *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* (2001-2003), *Els Segadors* (2001), *El Evento Suspendido* (2000), *Votos* (1999-2000), *Stuff* (1996-1999), *Access Denied* (1998), *Rights of Passage* (1997), *El Ultimo Deseo/The Last Wish* (1997), *Better Yet When Dead* (1996), *Pochonovela* (1995), *Mexarcane International* (1995), *The Couple in the Cage* (1992), *The Year of the White Bear* (1992), *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992), *La Chavela Realty Company* (1991), *Notre: Sur* (1990), *Havana Postmodern: The New Cuban Art* (1987).

Her curatorial projects include: *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self* (2000), *Mexico in Black and White: The Cinematography of Gabriel Figueroa* (1998), *Corpus Delecti* (1996), *Black American Short Films and Videos* (1992), *Robert Flaherty Seminar* (1991), *Black in a White World* (1989), *Internal Exile: New Films and Videos from Chile* (1990), *Border Crossings* (1989), *Young, British and Black: The Works of Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective* (1988), *Reviewing Histories: Selections from the New Latin American Cinema* (1987)

[7] Coco Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995) vii-xi. *English is Broken Here* will henceforth be referred to as *English Is* in citation brackets.

[8] Between the years of 1978-84, the American engagement in murderous counter-insurgency wars against Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador, (countries attempting to gain control of their political and economic apparatuses) implicated thousands of young American men of Latin descendency.

[9] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Metheun, 1987) 107. Spivak describes tokenism as the absorption of specific, potentially seditious individuals into the dominant discourse: "The putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order to better exclude the margin".

[10] The 'virtual globe' is used here to refer to the social state of the digital age wherein people from around the world are 'connected' by means of the internet.

[11] The traditional diorama-- a small, three dimensional box with a peephole, containing an accurate and detailed representation of a particular space-- grew popular during the historical move toward Naturalism/Realism. Gregory G. Scholette, *Allegory and Desire in the Art of the Diorama*. (Diss. U of California, 1995) 2.

Caging the Audience: The Uncanny and a Third Space of Representation in *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*

The practice of containing bodies and identities for pleasure and consumption is explored in Fusco's collaboration with Guillermo Gómez-Peña[1] entitled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*. Fusco contends that the performance "was based on the once popular European and North American practice of exhibiting indigenous people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas in zoos, parks, taverns, museums, freak shows, and circuses" (*English Is* 40). She observes, "[p]erformance art in the West did not begin with Dadist 'events'. Since the early days of European 'conquest', 'aboriginal samples' of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas were brought to Europe for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment" (*English Is* 41). *Two Amerindians* is a resurrection of this historical practice and was intended to ridicule the colonialist paradigms which facilitated such horrific exploits.

The concept for the piece was for Fusco and Gómez-Peña, "to live in a golden cage for three days, presenting [them]selves as undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by Europeans for five centuries" (*English Is* 39). The island was named Guatinau, and the performers, Guatinauis. That not one spectator had ever heard of the two's homeland was not a surprise to the performers: the entire existence of the caged specimens was fictional, created in the imaginations of Fusco and Gómez-Peña for the purposes of the performance. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* was performed nine times in a two year period, between 1992 and 1994. It toured across the United States, Europe, and Australia, and terminated after a performance in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Performances of the piece took place in museum spaces or outdoor public venues[2]. The artists' intentions were to create a "reverse ethnography" by performing "the identity of

an Other for a white audience" (*English Is* 39). The piece was thus carefully constructed by the collaborators to execute a farcical commentary on the history of European Imperialism in an engaging and entertaining manner.

But while the artists constructed the piece with many clues to its satiric nature, they claim astonishment at realizing that in each venue a large majority of the public fully bought into the fiction. These spectators believed they were viewing 'real' Amerindians who were on display for the first time. Fusco maintains such an "unexpected realit[y]" (*Bodies* 27) was not the aim of the aesthetic and was not something either performer had anticipated. While there were no specific mechanisms designed to gauge audience reactions and responses (ie: no feedback forms), Fusco is not hesitant to generalize about the piece's reception in an interview with BOMB magazine: "Consistently, the majority of our audiences believed we were real" (Johnson 50)[3]. If we believe Fusco's interpretation of her audience response, it seems as though an encompassing discourse confounded an understanding of the piece in regards to Fusco's original intentions. But whether the audience was naive enough to believe the fiction, or whether they were aware of the act as a performance, Fusco and Gómez-Peña were able to incite reaction by engaging particular notions of the 'other' which have roots in colonialist relations. This engagement both aided and defied audience expectation and in so doing, allowed the performers to resist being contained within the notions of 'other' they engaged.

The subversive success of the piece lies in the ability to construct what I will term a 'residual space of meaning'. This chapter will discuss the construction of this space by examining how Fusco's aesthetic is engaged by the spectator. A video documentary of her performance tour entitled *Couple in the Cage: A Guatinuai Odyssey*, created by Fusco and collaborator Paula Heredia, helped to inform my understanding of the various audience

reactions to Fusco's piece. This video will be considered later in this chapter for its contributions to Fusco's efforts. Fusco has revealed in her reflections upon *Two Amerindians* that she had hoped to provide the public with an "uncanny encounter" (*English Is* 40). This term will be discussed in detail, using Freud's observations on the uncanny. In short, I hope to show how Fusco, by providing her audience with an 'uncanny' event, is able to engage a dominant reading of her performance (that is, existing paradigms largely influenced by a colonialist past). Her ability to create what Homi K. Bhabha has termed the *Third Space* of Representation, however, fosters a 'residual space of meaning' which in turn prevents that dominant reading from providing a satisfactory interpretation of her aesthetic. The result is a spectacle which evokes surprise, curiosity, and a nagging sense of unease, as it leaves the spectator to wonder: between the audience and the caged specimen, exactly who is on display?

First it is helpful to consider the purposes of a diorama which appears to be Fusco's signature aesthetic form. Gregory G. Scholette, in *Allegory and Desire in the Art of the Diorama*, considers the diorama "a chiefly static form of representation that uses three-dimensional elements to mimic a naturalistic space. . . built for pedagogical ends" (1). The diorama, therefore, acts as an authentic representation of a reality which is separate from the space it exists in. Fusco's 'living' diorama refers back to the historical dioramic practices of human display; of putting people in their 'natural habitat' in zoos. Kurt Jonassohn in "On A Neglected Aspect of Western Racism" states,

> For more than half a century - from the beginning of the 1870s to the end of the 1930s- the exposition of so-called exotic peoples . . . were recurring features of [European] zoological gardens where they eclipsed the drawing power of the more usual animal exhibits. (1)

Such three dimensional displays of 'authentic' culture can now be found in synthetic form in various museums worldwide. The decision to exhibit the Amerindians installation in museums[4] is therefore in keeping with a tradition of dioramic display as a pedagogical tool. Diane Taylor, in her essay "A Savage Performance", states, "Since their inception in the 19th century museums have literalized theatricality-- taking the cultural other out of context and isolating it, reducing the live performance of cultural practice into a dead object behind glass" (164). It is this displacing of context, this fictionalizing of culture which Fusco is addressing with her fictional performance.

To help the reader understand the impact of the diorama, I have included a detailed description[5] of Fusco's piece. Set either in a popular public venue or museum, the cage that held the Guatinauis was approximately ten by twelve feet and gold coloured, a transportable device used in all of the venues. Fusco and Gómez-Peña were led by the 'docents'-- actors dressed in suit or sports jackets with name tags and "Ask Me" buttons-- by means of a leash around their necks into the cages, and out at the end of their three hour display. The docents were employed by the artists from the various venues in which the performances took place. In loud declamatory fashion, much like barkers at a side show circus, they encouraged the public to view the 'specimens' present and reminded the audience that the exhibit was the continuation of a long history of indigenous human display throughout Europe and North America. These curators provided information regarding the discovery of the inhabitants as well as speculation on the characteristics of the two. To inquisitive visitors, they also gave instructions about how to interact with Fusco and Gómez-Peña. For example, visitors were told to approach the cage directly and enunciate simple English words such as 'photo' if they wished to have their picture taken with either of the Amerindians.

An excerpt from the literature available to the public describes the two Guatinauis as follows:

> The male and female specimens here on display are representatives of the dominant tribe from their island, having descended from the Mintomani stock. The male weighs seventy-two kilos, measures 1.77 meters, and is approximately thirty-seven years of age. He likes spicy food, burritos, and Diet Coke, and his favorite cigarette brand is Marlboro. His frequent pacing in the cage leads experts to believe that he was a political leader on his island.
>
> The female weights sixty three kilos, measure 1.74 meters, and appears to be in her early thirties. She is fond of sandwiches, pad thai, and herb tea. She is a versatile dancer, and also enjoys showing off her domestic talents by sewing voodoo dolls, serving cocktails, and massaging her male partner. Her facial and body decoration indicate that she has married into the upper caste of her tribe.
>
> Both of the Guatinauis are quite affectionate in the cafe, seemingly uninhibited in their physical and sexual habits despite the presence of an audience. Their animist spirituality compels them to engage in periodic gestural prayers, which they do with great enthusiasm. They like to massage and scratch each other, enjoy occasional long embraces, and initiate sexual intercourse on the average of twice a day. (*English Is* 59-60)

It is evident from this description that Fusco and Gómez-Peña were deliberately exploiting traditional stereotypes of the non-white body in their construction of the Guatinauis identities. They also included a preposterous mix of various 'cultural' icons in

their construction of identities for the two, and the costume choices continued in this vein.

Gómez-Peña wore a collar of black leather, studded with silver spikes, and matching arm bands. His face was covered in a mask of leopard skin print, and his head was adorned with a construction of plumed feathers. A collar with spikes wreathed his neck, and a belt of decorative metal plates served as a loincloth. He wore sneakers on his feet, and sunglasses over the eye holes in his face mask. Occasionally, an "I accept tips" button was fastened to his brow. Fusco was often dressed in a grass skirt and leopard-print bikini top. During some performances she wore a lei of flowers or string of plastic beads around her neck and wrists. She alternated head pieces; a ball cap for some performances, or a small band of seashells in others, and long braided or loose wigs. She also wore sunglasses, and had her face painted either one or two colours in wide geometric patterns on her face. Her neck was laden with various bead and shell necklaces. Like Gómez-Peña, she wore sneakers and a collar to aid in her transport to and from the cage.

Once in the cage, Gómez-Peña and Fusco partook in various activities, which often included interacting with the objects provided. Among these objects were various modern technologies: a computer, a stereo, and a television, which were used periodically by the performers. Fusco would also sew small dolls of cloth; Gómez-Peña often paced and watched the television. Plastic gloves and sandwiches and fruit were on hand for visitors who wished to touch and/or feed the caged two, and a small donation box was also attached to the cage into which money could be dropped. Curators told visitors that the Guatinauis would perform various tasks for a fee: for fifty cents the female Guatinau would dance, for one dollar the spectator could pose for his photo with the two and, (incorporated during the performance in New York) for five dollars the male Guatinau

would display his genitalia. Visitors were told that the two were very demonstrative with children, and sexually affectionate with one another in private as "[a]nthropologists at the Smithsonian observed (with the help of surveillance cameras)" (*English Is* 60) that they occasionally adopted the objects in the cage for use as sex toys.

Attached to the cage were two plaques; one with a false map of the Gulf of Mexico depicting the location of the island of Guatinau, and one with highlights of the history of the display of non-Western humans. The juxtaposition of the cheery literature describing the specimens against the sombre reminder of human containment (the plaque) is powerful. While the spectator would most likely be witnessing such an intriguing spectacle for the first time, they would also be made aware that the display was not a new phenomenon.

This living diorama is an intriguing spectacle which encourages the spectator to willingly participate. It is also disconcerting: the appearance of two human beings enclosed within a cage contradicts perceptions of a universal, liberated existence. The piece *is* uncanny; but is it uncanny because it appears "seemingly supernatural; mysterious" (OED 994)? If we examine Freud's theories on the uncanny, we see that the implications of Fusco's ability to produce such an effect reveal particular insights which may help to explain audience interpretations.

Freud's introduction to his theories in "The 'Uncanny'" examine various definitions of the term in several languages. His desire to define the uncanny beyond the assertion that it equals "unfamiliar" lead him to explanations in several IndoEuropean languages, most of which align the term with words such as 'unease', 'sinister', or 'haunted'. He returns to the German language for a detailed description of the word *heimlich*[6] and in doing so uncovers a tendency for the word to connote its opposite,

unheimlich[7] (which means, literally, 'uncanny'). Depending on the context, these antonyms can become synonymous with one another. Freud extends the duality of the terms and comes up with the following definition of *unheimlich*: "on the one hand it means what is familiar . . . and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight" (Freud 225). In psychoanalytic terms, the implications of such an explanation are thus: "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud 241). If we adopt this definition, then Fusco's desire to provide an 'uncanny encounter' indicates she is attempting to tap into a memory which exists in the collective psyche, albeit 'subconsciously'.

Importantly, however, Freud considers the uncanny effect to be "often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced" (244). This considered, it is obvious that it is not Fusco's fictional resurrection of a moment in history which produces the uncanny effect; the sense of the 'familiar yet hidden' is not invoked simply by resurrecting an image which exists somewhere in the collective unconscious. And it is not the coupling of this memory with the recognizable yet foreign objects such as the voodoo dolls or grass skirt that gives the piece an uncanny feel. For as Freud indicates, a sense of the *real* must be present. Moments exposed within an obvious fantasy/fiction cannot produce the sense of the uncanny because a crucial sense of *uncertainty* is lost. In other words, when encountering Fusco's piece, there must be a moment in which the visitor is unsure of his grasp on fiction and reality. Whether or not the audience buys in to the fiction, that brief moment of uncertainty is critical to producing the uncanny effect.

According to Freud, this uncertainty is our uneasiness with the circumstances of

our observed reality and stems from a primitive understanding of the world. He states,

> We . . . once believed that [certain] possibilities were realities, and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have *surmounted* these modes of thought: but we do not feel quite sure of our beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. (Freud's emphasis 247)

These certain possibilities Freud refers to are conceptions such as the prompt fulfilment of wishes or the omnipotence of thought and are indicative of a primitive perception of reality. I would say that traditional views of the non-white body, having roots in colonial relations, are primitive because they are "undeveloped, crude, simple" (ODE[s] 709). If we extend Freud's idea to Fusco's performance, myths surrounding the native body which have been 'corrected' in the post-modern, post-colonial age, seem to be reawakened to produce the uncanny effect.

Consider the following excerpt from Charles White's 18th century *Account of the Regular Gradation of Man* (1799):

> If there be various species of mankind, they must be a natural aristocracy among them, a dominant white species as opposed to the lower races who by their origin are destined to serve the nobility of mankind, and may be tamed, trained, and used like domestic animals, or may, according to circumstances, be fattened or used for physiological or other experiment without any compunction. (quoted in Young 7)

While White's ludicrous and unscientific postulations do not signify the extent of the racial discrimination and myth-making which typifies the age of Colonialism, they are but a small indication of the colonial conceptions in which Western thought historically

floundered. Returning to Freud we find, "as soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded beliefs, we get a feeling of the uncanny" (Freud's emphasis 248). If Fusco has been successful in creating an uncanny encounter, she has done so by tapping into existing colonialist paradigms which have constructed a particular view of the non-white body. In the case of viewing *Amerindians*, Freud would say that the feeling of the uncanny is produced as the audience has the momentary 'realization': "So! That native body belongs in a cage after all!".

In his essay, "The Other Question", Homi Bhabha observes the kind of stereotype of the non-white body that would 'legitimize' his/her containment:

> The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. (82)

These notions of 'other', which characterize him/her with mysticism, carnality and a limited understanding of the modern, scientific world are exposed by Fusco's ability to produce the uncanny. They are also deliberately exploited by Fusco and Gómez-Peña in an effort to ridicule such perceptions. The fact that much of the audience believed the Amerindians to be 'real' despite the rather obvious play upon these stereotypes indicates that myths surrounding the non-white body prevail strongly, however unconsciously, in contemporary ideologies.

Bhabha identifies stereotypes in colonial discourse as synonymous with a fetishization of the 'other'. Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* is useful to explain Bhabha's contention that fetishization results as the colonizer attempts to maintain an

autonomous subject position. Bhabha states, "The fetish or stereotype gives access to an identity which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence-- the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division" (75). While Bhabha references Lacan's notions of subjectivity by citing the anxiety that arises from the knowledge that 'originality' is in fact impossible, I extend the logic to Derrida's concept of *différance*. Derrida explains *différance* as "the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences" (Easthope 115). His observations on this concept explore the ways in which a language of metaphors and tropes in binary oppositions guarantee a centre and a periphery. The implications of Derrida's deconstruction of the origins of language hold important implications for the construction of an identity for the subaltern. If we can accept that the 'pure origin' of which Bhabha speaks can only be described or conceptualized through a process of engaging *différance*, then it is clear that there is no origin to which the subject can return. Thus, *différance*-- the process of producing meaning through an endless chain of signifiers-- must be disavowed in order for the colonizer to claim an autonomous subject position. The creation of an identity for the colonized as 'other' is thus an attempt to disavow the *construction* of the centre (as opposed to the centre as a natural state). Skin is the signifier for cultural and racial difference, or 'otherness', and the colonizer, in constructing an identity for the unknown 'other', also constructs a fantasy of the known and visible other. The repression of the knowledge of *différance* is thus accomplished in the process of fetishizing the other, which Fusco's aesthetic decisions facilitated.

The Guatinauis' preposterous assortment of clothing is a ridiculous melding of 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' worlds. The 'authentic' choices for the characters-- braided

hair, face paint, feathers and shells-- contrast significantly with the running shoes, leopard print spandex material, and sunglasses. The result is a colourful marriage of natural and synthetic materials; of old and new. Fusco herself declares, "We looked like we walked off the set of Gilligan's Island" (*www.moma.org/ onlineprojects/conversations/ trans_cfusco.html*). Thus, the two appear removed from the 'civilized' world yet simultaneously fascinated with it. They cling to their 'primitive' dress while incorporating elements of the Western world into their appearance: they are a blend of the sentimentality of tradition and the success of capitalism. As Bhabha has stated, the colonizer sees that "under certain conditions of colonial domination and control the native is progressively reformable" (83). To the colonizer's gaze, these two, being 'primitive' yet the 'manipulator[s] of social forces' (85) are learning the intricacies of the civilized world without fully reforming their primordial existence. And the intrigue aroused by this interaction far outweighed the plausibility of the situation in the minds of many spectators.

Further, central to the stereotype of the noble-yet-savage native is a highly charged sexual nature. Fusco states,

> We had a lot of sexualized reactions to us. Men in Spain put coins in a donation box to get me to dance because, as they said, they wanted to see my tits. There was a woman in Irvine who asked for a rubber glove in order to touch Guillermo and started to fondle him in a sexual manner. There were several instances where people crossed the boundaries of expected sexual behavior. (Johnson 50)

The artists' decision to display bare skin encouraged the audience to enter relationships of fantasy with a sexualized stereotype. Fusco explains, "To repressed Westerners, my

costume represented pure sexuality" (Johnson 55). As such, the absurdity of the costume-- which could normally signify parody-- paled in light of the intrigue that was instigated at the sight of naked native flesh.

This fascination was likely enhanced by the distinct gender roles Fusco and Gómez-Peña played. Gómez-Peña states "When we appear in the cage, I am the cannibal, I am the warrior, this threatening masculine other who causes fear in the viewer. Coco performs the noble savage... the quiet, subdued innocent" (Johnson 50). Gómez-Peña, as the male savage, was intriguing to the public because while he appeared dangerous, he could also be touched, much like a wild animal who has been tranquillized. Fusco was primarily a passive, feminine object of sexual desire who would dance and pose for pictures on command. Both were physically affectionate, and it seems that their contact with other human bodies and their described nocturnal activities made evident their 'rampant sexuality'. The actions in which the two participated solidified their gender roles while further concretizing the stereotypes Bhabha identifies. Fusco's character played with dolls and danced, exhibiting the 'innocence' and the 'simple-minded[ness]' of the fetishized savage of which Bhabha speaks; Gómez-Peña performed seemingly spiritual incantations to fulfil any expectations of native mysticism. Their fascination with the 'modern devices' of television and cassette player indicate a remodelling of their 'primitive' existence.

Here we should return to Freud's description of the uncanny. For his contention that the uncanny is produced when "the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced", goes on to include the instance in which "a symbol takes over the full functions of the things it symbolizes" (244). We have seen how, by tapping into an existing fetish, Fusco is able to blur the line between fiction and fact thus producing the uncanny effect.

But the transformation of a symbol into that which it signifies also produces that sense of the uncanny. Jean Alter, in *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*, provides detailed analyses of theatre semiotics that are useful when considering Freud's definition. In regards to representation, Alter explains that in order for communication to occur in any form, the receiver must *concretize* the sign[9] (my emphasis), which is "a mental operation that relies on each receiver's individual imagination, association of ideas, background" (27). Importantly, in Alter's definition of signs as signified, signs can never refer to themselves. Only when the contents of the performance space are desemiotized-- that is, stripped from their function as signs-- can they refer to themselves.

For *Two Amerindians*, it appears that for a majority of audience members, there are no discernible signs to either concretize or desemiotize. For them, Fusco is not an actor playing an undiscovered Amerindian, she *is* an Amerindian; similarly, Gómez-Peña is not performing a tribal chief, he *is* the tribal chief. However, despite the surprise occurrence of the bizarre display, it is hard to imagine that people were this easily duped. While I am speculating, it seems reasonable to assume that an encounter with such a display would produce reactions somewhere in the order of shock, confusion, amusement/disgust/anger, and finally, 'understanding'. It is in this 'understanding' that the process of concretizing the signs will occur. And, gradually, the uncanny effect is produced as signs mutate into their referents.

As the drama develops, the credibility of the fantasy increases. Alter states, "when the signifier has no perceptible resemblance with the referent, the sign will be called a symbol, or a symbolic sign" (27). Freud has indicated that when the opposite occurs-- when the symbol is in fact synonymous with the referent-- the uncanny effect is produced. To illustrate, let us consider two significant and symbolic signs in Fusco's

performance.

The first of these is the leash which was used to safely 'transport' the Amerindians to and from their containment. The leashes are inadequate restraining devices and therefore not functional items. (The curators who led the two to the cage were small women and quite obviously no match physically for Gómez-Peña's stature and build). The idea that the leashes served a functional purpose is preposterous, unless the 'savage', as Bhabha says, is viewed as both dangerous and compliant at once. The extension of this logic then , is that one who is 'savage' and yet 'most obedient' could be coerced into this schizophrenic situation. The uncanny is here reinforced as the symbolism of the leash-- repression, containment of an animalistic force-- which cannot logically execute any utilitarian purpose becomes the means to achieve such restraint. In this case the leashes do not inform the viewer of the parody; there is no distinction between the symbolism and the functionality of the item. And this phenomenon extends to the signifier of the cage.

A cage is one of the most primitive yet effective forms of containment, and has been used throughout history for the display of various life forms. It haunts the collective unconscious because it represents the denial of freedom by an external force. Whether the specimen is considered dangerous, or a curiosity, or something aesthetically pleasing to the eye, the motivation behind its containment reflects the gazer's perception that it is different; an 'other'. In the democratic, Western world, the idea of caging animals for display is still common practice, but the idea of caging humans for display is supposedly a thing of the past[10]. This signifier is used specifically in Fusco's piece to invoke a sense of containment that is both fascinating and horrifying. But instead of symbolizing the containment of the 'other' within a marginalizing gaze, the cage becomes the means to

contain the subaltern for that specific purpose!

As Fusco's symbols become that which they signify, the Guatinauis become the subject of the audience's desire/fear. Bhabha maintains that the native subject is "a site of productive power, both subservient and always potentially seditious. What is increased is the visibility of the subject as an object of surveillance, tabulation, enumeration and indeed, paranoia and fantasy" (76). It is exactly this process of surveying and romanticizing the subject made visible that Fusco's piece uncovers. And as the spectator is free to project his/her fantasies upon the scrutinized being, the 'known but hidden' rises to the surface in audience interpretation[11].

To complete our examination of the resurfacing of the fetishized 'other', we consider the decision by Fusco and Gómez-Peña to maintain a vow of silence in the cage. During the performance, the only words spoken were uttered in the 'Guatinaui' native tongue by the male Guatinaui. By making verbal communication between the viewer and the viewed impossible, the piece was kept congruent with the historical practice to which it refers. Importantly, this denial of language also goes beyond contemporary restraints on subaltern speech. Because while the contemporary subaltern can utilize utterance (this made more efficacious as intercultural exchange increases), the listener (colonizer) does not recognize that utterance as such (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 27). Fusco, here, has taken this exchange a step further. She and Gómez-Peña have deliberately situated themselves as the voiceless other, both confounding interpretation and also leaving it wide open.

Theorist Diane Taylor states, "[t]he colonialist discourse that produces the native as negativity or lack itself silences the very voice it purports to make speak" (162). In this case, the projection of the viewer's fantasies onto the silent cage first and foremost

allows the fiction to be real, and secondly allows the appearance of the stereotyped natives to become curiosities to be defined. Taylor explains, "Then, insofar as native bodies are invariably presented as not speaking (or not making themselves understood to the defining subject), they give rise to an industry of 'experts' needed to approach and interpret them" (162). Fusco's states: "Other people were absolutely convinced that they understood Guillermo's language, which is virtually impossible because it's a nonsense language. One man in London stood there and translated Guillermo's story for another visitor" (Johnson 50). Even if the spectator was 'playing at' interpretation, the response recalls Spivak's suggestion as that the subaltern body exists to be interpreted it can never possess a voice worthy of speech that requires no interpretation.

Fusco and Gómez-Peña created *Amerindians* in a facetious manner which was intended to expose such stereotypes of the non-white body. Importantly, the subversive success of the performance does not rely upon creating a moment for the duped spectators to realize the fictitous nature of the display, nor does it depend upon the presence of some astute viewers: Fusco's performance is subversive because it creates a 'residual space of meaning' which confounds interpretation, no matter how gullible, Eurocentric or 'wise to the performance' the spectator may be.

We recall Bhabha's contention that colonial dominance is maintained by a disavowal of *différance*. This disavowal-- what Bhabha terms fetishization-- is critical to the positioning of the non-white as the always-already known to guarantee the authority of the colonizer. What happens, however, when the "rules of recognition and discriminatory identities by means of which the disavowal is enforced" (Larsen 146) are contradicted, and how is this accomplished? Bhabha answers, "Hybridity reverses the formal process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization

becomes the conditionality of colonial discourse" (Bhabha 114). Through hybridity, "other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (114). It is in this estrangement that Bhabha's Third Space of representation is created. Bhabha states that this space, this enuciative process, can introduce

> a split between the traditional culturalist demand for a model, a tradition, a community, a stable system of reference, and the necessary negation of the certitude in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance. (35)

The *hybridity* of Fusco's performance thus facilitates the creation of this Third Space, allowing the piece to form residual meanings which cannot be decoded by traditional conventions of interpreting 'culture'. The varying audience responses to the piece indicate that indeed, a dominant reading does not satisfy the reader's sense that she has 'got it'.

To explain this gap in meaning, I focus our attention on the fact that while certain members bought into the fiction and others could identify the display as a performance, the artists received countless complaints from both groups who decided that their depiction was not "authentic enough" (*English Is* 46). Spectators who had never heard of the Guatinaui people, as well as those who realized they were fictional, seemed to possess a need to pass judgment on the authenticity of the two. Such a response indicates that the term 'native' brings with it a particular yet homogeneous identity. As Bhabha states, "Colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (76). In other words, the colonizer, having fetishized the non-white in a particular identity, knows best what could be considered an

accurate depiction of him/her.

For Fusco's audience, the "hybridity of the contents of the cage [was taken]. . . as a sign of our lack of authenticity" (Johnson 50). The rules that delineate identity were broken, for inherent in the spectator's criticism is the assumption that in order for a native body to be a native body, it must be devoid of any kind of 'Western' characteristics. Defending her 'hybrid' choices Fusco states, "We wanted to make fun of this very Eurocentric notion that other people operate in a pristine world untouched by Western civilization" (Johnson 51). Gómez-Peña explains this as the Western need to maintain control of the gaze by controlling information about the 'other'. He states, "The bottom line is they don't want us to be part of the same present or the same time. They want us to operate outside of history" (Johnson 51). The 'hybridity' of the bodies also instigated confusion: "In Spain there were many complaints that our skin was not dark enough for us to be 'real' primitives" (*English Is* 56).

Inherent in the aforementioned audience response is one of two desires (or both): the desire to repress the memory of a history of colonization and intercultural exchange, or a yearning for an 'authentic' experience of culture. The hybridity of the performance effectively confounds both cravings. And as those desires are denied, the position of the spectator as he/she understands it is also destabilized. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in her essay *The Ethnographic Burlesque*, states "What distinguishes The Couple in the Cage[12] from a sermon is precisely. . . the impossibility of an appropriate reaction. There is no tenable audience position" (178). If Fusco's audience buys into the fiction represented, they are revealed as neo-imperialists; if they understand it as performance and play along with the drama, they appear apathetic perpetrators of a colonialist discourse. Fusco states, "Believing it or not believing it, [the audience] know[s] what the rules of the game

are so that they enter into the dynamic really easily" (interview, *Couple in the Cage*). There is thus no reprieve from the deflected gaze: no matter the response, the audience cannot feel completely satisfied with their interpretation.

The documentary videotape of the performance tour, entitled *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey* is a valuable aid for my understanding of Fusco's aesthetic and the reaction to her piece. This video reveals several spectators whose responses indicate that their experience with the performance was far from satisfying. One woman in Minneapolis complains, "I feel like I'm being put on. . . . and it's kind of offensive in that it feels kind of like a slap in the face". A man in Sydney felt that the display "Just didn't sound one hundred percent" and a spectator in Washington DC states, "[the female's] dancing . . . does not give me the effect that; say I would see on TV from someone who has gone into a country and has lived in a culture with people *unlike my own* . . . that to me looks like something for fifty cents" (my emphasis).

It appears from such reactions that the non-white body is specifically constructed in Western ideology, so specifically in fact, that Fusco's audience could 'recognize' the instant that this identity was distorted. Mary Kate Kelly, in her essay "Performing the Other" states, "the critical spectators' assertion reflects the assumption that a 'true' or 'authentic' primitive does exist today, even if Fusco and Gómez-Peña were not the real thing themselves" (129). In having that image of the 'primitive' body confounded, the dominant position of the colonizer/interpreter/spectator is also threatened. In this way, the hybridity of the performance executes a successful "strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (Bhabha 112). And the result was a particularly captious audience.

Aside from the complaints of the piece being 'unauthentic', Fusco was also

criticized for misleading her audience; "for not revealing the 'reality' of [her] performance" (Kelly 130). Implicit in this criticism is the charge that performance must be placed in a recognizable context in order to remain responsible to the audience, and in order to legitimately comment upon reality. Patrice Pavis identifies this recognizable context in the following excerpt from *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*:

> We are so much caught in the network of our national cultural modelizations, Eurocentric in this case, that we find it difficult to conceive of the study of performance or of a theatrical genre within a perspective other than that of our acquaintance with the European practice of theatre. (11)

Hence, the aesthetic form Fusco utilized was identified as 'unethical', rather than an innovative or alternative genre of performance[13]. However, this 'unethical' aesthetic created a space which was necessary to prevent a dominant reading of the performance from accurately interpreting its purpose. As Kelly observes, people who complained of the piece's 'immoral' facade "fail to recognize the potentially profound impact of an 'unmediated' or unguided interaction between the artists and the viewers" (Kelly 129). Here Kelly identifies the power of the 'uncanny' experience for which Fusco was aiming.

Fusco's ability to destabilize the position/identity of the spectator/interpreter is key to her ability to subvert a marginalizing gaze. She successfully negotiates the Third Space, which "makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code" (Bhabha 37). But while the performance confounds an identificatory spectator position, the video documentary of the performance instigates different confusion that, at first glance, appears contradictory to

Fusco's aims.

The Couple in the Cage introduces the viewer to various gullible spectators. One white male is fascinated with Gómez-Peña's preoccupation with objects he "doesn't appear to understand". A young military soldier is pleased that the two "pick up traditions really well. Like drinkin' Coca Cola, listening to music, watchin' TV and eatin' saltine crackers. . . That's American for ya'". Another asks, "No one shaves [the female] or anything like that?" A white woman in a fur coat attempts to decode the story of the male Guatinauis' traditional homeland, even though she admits she can't understand it. And a man with an Australian accent expresses his desire to join Fusco in her native dance in the cage. All of these spectators appear to have bought in to the fiction, and they all look appropriately ridiculous and compassionless.

In fact, to the viewer who understands the context of the video-- a documentary of performance art-- most of the showcased audience members appear nothing short of foolish and tactless perpetrators of imperialist ideology. One white Spaniard who actually understands the piece as performance art is still revealed as considerably Eurocentric, stating, "As long as its a joke, its fine. You have to see the humour in all of this". What the video makes plain, however, is that the history of the display of indigenous peoples is no laughing matter: the audience responses are inter cut with various snapshots and drawings of previously discovered and displayed indigenes, accompanied with a haunting underscore. It is a sobering reminder of the horrors of colonialism.

The only two spectators who are shown to understand the display as performance *and* a satire are a man speaking a Spanish dialect, and a Native American man. The video make ambiguous whether the one white girl who expresses her horror and sadness at the display has bought in to the fiction, or understands the pieces' intentions.

Watching the video, it is prudent to keep in mind that this audience itself has been captured within a specific mode of representation. Diane Taylor states, "the video 'captures' or 'cages' the viewer" (170), much like the Amerindians are caged for display. Everything visible has been dictated by Fusco's own perception of what is worthy of representation. Thus, the problem of considering the video an indication of a general audience response cannot be overlooked.

Essentially, this video exposes and produces the 'other' in the same way the system of representation that Fusco's piece attacks contains and interprets the other. The video appears to be offering 'proof' of Fusco's claims that her audience bought in to the fiction and projected their own fantasies on to the cage. The documentary-style short contains the 'evidence' for the reverse ethnography Fusco has attempted to create, and it appears to stand as a document of cultural behaviour. This detail does not sit well with some critics. Diane Taylor states, "I, personally, feel gloriously Latin American when I watch this video, very empowered knowing I 'get it' and 'they' don't. That's what *relajo* is all about" (169). Taylor is speaking here of a satisfaction in identifying, and knowing better than, those who are 'othered' in the video-- a discovery which she finds alarming in the context of the piece's intentions. The fact that Fusco has turned the process of 'othering' back on its usual perpetrators implicates her in the dilemma she is attempting to criticize. But while it appears Fusco is falling into the representational trap she proposes to dismantle, it seems hard to believe that she would not be able to foresee this possibility.

I am inclined to give this theorist/artist the benefit of the doubt and assume that Fusco has decided that any criticism garnered by her carefully constructed and controlled documentary of a white audience's exposed ignorance emphasizes her exact point.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states, "the *Couple in the Cage* shifts the locus of repudiation and admonishment from the 'other' to the practises of 'othering" (177). If Gimblett includes Fusco's video itself in that practice of 'othering', then I believe she has hit upon the exact point. A double 'othering' occurs in the *Couple in the Cage*-- the white audience engages a process of 'othering' as they 'interpret' Gómez-Peña's speech or jokingly feed bananas to Fusco. Fusco in turn consciously 'others' this audience by capturing them at their most naive, their most ridiculous, racist and licentious, and then by containing them in that image as testament to their revealed ideologies. Neither process seems to adequately respond to/represent the reality of the situation. Fusco's video thus illustrates that systems of representation are coercive; they are hegemonic in their efforts to depict the 'other'. In contrast, her performance piece shows us that a space of residual meaning can be created that denies the hegemony of traditional representation. It is clear that methods that disavow a taxonomic evaluation are the key to avoiding a marginalizing process of 'othering'. While Fusco's video engages and exposes the folly of 'othering', her performance successfully demonstrates how representation can depict bodies outside of their dominant classifications.

In this chapter I have attempted to illustrate how, if we can accept Freud's notion that the uncanny effect is produced when the 'familiar yet hidden' resurfaces in our consciousness, we can see that Fusco exposes a distinctly Eurocentric process of othering in her contemporary Western audience. This 'othering', this creation of stereotypes is, as Bhabha has described, a process of fetishizing the non-white body in an attempt to disavow *différance*. Fusco's aesthetic decisions-- engaging the fetish and utilizing hybridity-- foster and challenge the image of the subaltern to which the majority of her audiences assent. In *Couple in the Cage*, Fusco's audience is effectively coerced by the

hegemony of her medium-- the documentary-- just as the practice of 'displaying' foreign culture, or promoting 'cultural diversity' saddles the individual with a particular identity. As such, the video subverts the process of othering, forces the spectator into the role of the colonizer, and in so doing, incites debate in regards to the ethics of representation.

Two Amerindians engages in a process of fetishization that cannot provide a satisfying read of the performance. Whether the spectators buy into the fiction, or 'understand' it to be a performance, all are left to piece together a meaning which both implicates and excludes them. As the position of the audience member is untenable, the relationship of spectator/spectacle vacillates and in turn, confounds a static meaning. By creating this space of residual meaning, Fusco is able to successfully negotiate the Third Space; where enunciation can not be interpreted according to Eurocentric paradigms which rely on notions of the 'other'. The subversive success of *Two Amerindians Visit the West* therefore lies in Fusco's ability to tap into and engage hidden desires and preconceptions while simultaneously undermining the authority on which those paradigms are based .

Notes

[1] Interdisciplinary artist/writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña also collaborated with Fusco on *Notre/Sur* (1990), *La Chavela Realty Company* (1991), and *Mexarcane International* (1994).

[2] The first venue to receive the performance was Columbus Plaza in Madrid as part of the Edge '92 Biennial, which was to celebrate Madrid as the Euorpean capital of culture.

[3] The information about audience response that is outlined in Fusco's writings is largely comprised of her own and Gómez-Peña's interpretations of audience action and reaction, and the actors playing 'zoo guard' or 'docent' expressed comments and questions the audience had about the performance to Fusco and Gómez-Peña after the performance (as evidenced by the videotape, *Couple in The Cage: A Guatinau Odyssey*, which documented the performance tour).

[4] Performances were held at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (1992), the Australian Museum of Natural History in Sydney (1992), the Field Museum of Chicago (1993), and the Whitney Museum in New York (1993).

[5] Sources for the description of the piece include *English is Broken Here*, "A Conversation with Coco Fusco" (www.moma.org/onlineprojects/conversations/trans-cfusco.html), video project *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*, and my own email correspondences with Coco Fusco herself.

[6] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol XVII (1917-19)*. (London: Hogarth, 1955) 218-252. Definitions of *heimlich* include, "I. Also *heimelich*, *heimleig*, belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc. . . . II. Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others." (223).

[7] "' *Unheimlich*' is customarily used . . . as the contrary only of the first signification of '*heimlich*', and not of the second . . . everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (225).

[8] *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992).

[9] Jean Alter, *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990) 22-24. Alter defines a sign as "*something that stands for, or refers to, something else that it is not*" (original italics). The signified, then, is the sign's "distinct material form".

[10] Kurt Jonassohn, "On a Neglected Aspect of Western Racism." (Association of Genocide Scholars Meeting. Minneapolis. 9-12 June. 2001) screen 1. <www.migs.concordia.ca/occpapers/zoo.htm> Jonassohn posits an economical and not an ethical explanation for the halt in human display. Jonassohn maintains that 'human zoos' were common practice in Europe until the beginning of WWII, which drained the capital to sustain them.

[11] Fusco reveals that, being a woman, she was much more accustomed to this projection of a spectator's desires than was Gómez-Peña. Fusco's character, doubly objectified, was able to turn off that complete sense of surveillance, while Gómez-Peña, unaccustomed to the same objectification, was devastated by the constant examination of his person. Gómez-Peña's experience thus appears to parallel more strongly that of the first indigenes to be exhibited by the early colonists: the experience was foreign, intrusive, and morally devastating. At the same time Fusco's experience is distinctly contemporary. Fusco's experience speaks to the objectification of women in society, and further to the contemporary practice of 'othering' the native body. Importantly, Fusco's subsequent works have dealt most often with the subaltern female, a focus which was perhaps encouraged by the experience of this installation.

[12] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "The Ethnographic Burlesque". TDR. vol 42 (2) 175-180. As it has been described, *The Couple in the Cage* is a video documentary of the performance tour: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (mis)uses the title here to signify the performance itself.

[13] Fusco recounts "The reviewer sent by the *Washington Post*, for example, was so furious about our 'dishonesty' that she could barely contain her anger and had to be taken away by attendants . . . After receiving two written complaints and the *Washington Post* review, the director of public programs for the Smithsonian Natural History Museum gave a talk in Australia severely criticizing us for misleading the public" (*English Is* 54).

The Only Good Latina is a Dead Latina?
Representation and Necrophilia in *Better Yet When Dead*

Continuing in her exploration of the constructed and contained 'other', Fusco developed a piece in 1996 entitled *Better Yet When Dead*, which focused specifically on the plight of the female subaltern. This piece premiered at YYZ Artists' Outlet[1] in Toronto in April 1997 and was also performed at the Festival Internacional de Arte de Medellin, Columbia, the same year[2]. Fusco again utilized the diorama, but did not provide a 'surprise' encounter for her audience as she did with *Two Amerindians*. Spectators came to the performance space with the understanding that they would be attending a series of 'wakes' for specific Latina celebrities: Sor Juana, Frida Kahlo, Eva Perón, Selena Quantanilla Perez, and Ana Mendieta. Fusco states, "after more than two years of exhibiting myself in a cage, I was looking for other visual metaphors for containment that might allow me to activate the psychodynamics of cross-cultural attraction" (*Bodies* 22). Fusco, using a coffin as a metaphor for the containment of the 'other', once more offered her own body as the site of a fetishistic encounter for her audience.

Fusco's observations about the cultural 'ideal' of Latina femininity and the material conditions facing Latinas incited her to create *Better Yet When Dead*. She maintains that Latin America, despite its construction of a remarkable assortment of cults to female figures, "is still a terrain where women do not exercise control over their bodies" (*Bodies* 22[3]). She states, "[Women] gain power over the collective cultural investment in their bodies when they die spectacular deaths" (22). It is a phenomenon that Fusco equates with a kind of "necrophilia" as is the "American cultural" infatuation with female creativity once it has been forever silenced by death (22). Fusco notes that Latina artists appear with new prestige in mainstream American culture after they have died in sensational ways. Both cultural responses to the posthumous Latina body indicate, for

Fusco, that a process of necrophilia informs the ideal of Latina femininity.

Fusco explains her decision to create *Better Yet When Dead* as follows:

> After the Tex-Mex singer Selena was shot and killed by a colleague last year, and the People Magazine bearing her image sold more copies than any other issue in the publication's history, I began to ask myself why Latino cultures in the north and south are so fascinated with female creativity once it has been forever silenced. Clearly, there are aspects of Catholicism that celebrate female suffering as a virtue, and which have often been used to encourage Latin women to accept mental and physical abuse; however it seems to me that the stakes are raised when female artists are involved in the equation, in that the very ambivalence toward ceding access to women in public life expresses itself perfectly in the sharp change in attitudes toward women artists before and after their death. It is almost as if a violent death makes them more acceptably feminine. (*www.thing.net~coco fusco*)

Fusco decided to perform that ultimate expression of femininity by dressing up as various dead female celebrities and inviting spectators to attend each woman's wake.

Fusco indicates that her celebrity choices-- Sor Juana, Frida Kahlo, Eva Perón, Ana Mendieta and Selena Quantanilla Perez-- were women who "got shafted in reality and then deified at the moment of their death" (*www.moma.org/onlineprojects/conversations/trans_cfusco.html*). I will pause here for a brief description of these women's lives and deaths to flesh out this explanation.

Sor Juana, the earliest historical figure Fusco includes in her representation, begins the narrative of adversity to which Fusco refers. She was a nun living in a cloistered

convent in Mexico in the mid to late 1600s. Her prolific poetry, the majority of it published posthumously, has since garnered her the title of the last great practitioner in Spanish poetry of the baroque style (Peters IX). Though Sor Juana lived a life restricted to the confines of San Jerónimo Convent and was thus restricted from participating in "the elaborate cultural life of the city surrounding her Jeronymite convent" (Bergmann 152), she is now regarded by many as a worldly and influential feminist writer, far ahead of her time (Peters 2). She was recognized as a prodigy at an early age in life too, however, "while she was respected for her intellectual accomplishments, she was also marginalized as a freakish phenomenon and kept on display" (Bergmann 152). In an effort to discourage her from her secular studies which inspired her poetry, the Church sent Sor Juana to tend victims of the plague. It was a death sentence: after years of attempting to articulate feminist ideas which the Church systematically repressed, Sor Juana's contracted the plague and died during her position of servitude in 1695.

Frida Kahlo is considered by many to be the prototype of artistic female suffering. A Mexican painter whose life in the early twentieth century was riddled with various hardships and illness, Kahlo executed only one solo show of her art work during her lifetime as a painter. She died from complications arising from stomach cancer-- a public and very painful ordeal. The years that have followed her death have garnered her new attentions, such that she is currently "the most famous twentieth-century artist of Latin America and one of the most famous artists in the world" (Rummel 15). In contemporary feminist and artistic circles, Kahlo is "the perfect romantic heroine: one who suffered greatly, died young, and spoke directly through her art to our atavistic fears of sterility and death" (Zamora 8). Kahlo's arduous life which entailed a brush with death, physical disability and an unfaithful husband can be discerned through her tortured

renderings.

This narrative of female suffering and strength continues in the story of Eva Perón's life. Perón endured the scandal surrounding her illegitimate birth in a small community until she left as a young woman to seek out a career as an actress. In the capital city, "[f]or ten years, a time when her frailty and occasional hunger worried better known members of the theatre world, her hunt was grim and silent" (Taylor 35). Her struggle in those early years was plagued with poverty and her assent to First Lady of Argentina was made difficult by her failing health. Despite her illness, Eva Perón continued her efforts for social reform in Argentina, "refus[ing] to do anything to reverse [her illness] or even to retard it" (Taylor 58). When she died in July 26, 1952, "Eva Perón was arguably the most powerful woman in the world. But Argentineans giving vent to their hatred or expressing their love of Eva Perón remember her special power as emotional and intuitive, violent, mystical, uninstitutionalized" (Taylor 11). The image of Perón, venerated and loathed in life, was deified in death.

Multi-disciplinary artist Ana Mendieta is now celebrated as one of the most eminent performance artists of her time, though her life of anguish is discerned through her "poetics of exile" (Fusco, *Corpus* 12). Born in Havana to wealthy parents in 1948 she 'immigrated' from Cuba to the United States in September 1961 "through an exodus program sponsored by the U.S., the Catholic Church, and corporate sponsors after Fidel Castro declared Cuba a 'socialist country' in the spring of 1961" (Blocker 51) Mendieta was placed in various institutions: foster homes, orphanages, and juvenile correction facilities before enrolling in an art school in Iowa (Blocker 52). Her series of experimental performances and art works during her short career in the 1970s speak of a particular seclusion; of a desperate sense of disembodiment. In her many videos, drawings, prints,

installations and sculptures, Mendieta used her own body as a medium to explore social taboos and transgression. Her aesthetic was ritualistic and often incorporated blood, nudity, and mutilation. Her technique of combining nature with the practice of Santeria led her art to being marginalized within a primitive, exotic frame. Mendieta's artwork skyrocketed in value when she fell to her death from the apartment she shared with her husband, Carl Andre, in 1985. Although her husband was acquitted of her murder, the true cause behind her fall is still unknown.

Selena, who died a spectacular death like Mendieta, was a Tejano singer in Texas --virtually unknown outside her border regions. Selena began singing at age seven at the insistence of her father, and formed a band with her brothers. Years of touring and recording demanded Selena sacrifice her childhood life of school and friends but awarded the family a slow and gradual rise to fame in the Latino music market (Anijar 88). In 1995, the year Selena seemed poised to crack the American music market, she was shot to death by an obsessed female employee who was suffering from unrequited love. In death, Selena achieved the fame she struggled for in life, finding international acclaim after years of being known only to the Latina community. Her records, including the posthumously released English album "Dreaming of You", sold in unprecedented numbers in the years following her death. Selena is now considered by her devotees "everything a Hispanic woman should be" (Anijar 96).

The details of the women's lives suggests reason for their arrangement together in Fusco's piece: the women suffered various sacrifices and difficulties in life to accomplish their goals, and now hold a celebrity status they cannot enjoy. In life, they have endured marginalization, illness, poverty, domestic abuse, exile-- and their deaths were very public ordeals. The "phenomenon of these young Latin women dying very tragic deaths and then

becom[ing] household names" strikes Fusco as a process of necrophilia worth critical examination.

Fusco's decision to play the dead celebrities herself can be viewed as a comment on the present conditions of female artistic recognition within her own spheres of influence. She states,

> I had lived through five years of being publicly constructed-- by women and men-- as a female appendage to a male performer[4]. If I responded to this misogynist gaze by asserting my equal status or by suggesting that I had had a career before I collaborated with a male partner, I got absolutely nowhere. (*Bodies* 22)

Better Yet When Dead was thus a solo project which aimed to dispel assumptions that Fusco was the 'extension' of her male partner. The irony of Fusco playing dead to define herself cannot be overstated. By using her own body as medium, Fusco positions herself as an object of the necrophilia that is enacted upon the images of the Latina artists. Like those Latinas, interest in Fusco's identity as performance artist is aroused at the sight of her 'dead' body. Her ability to break free of her containment as 'appendage' is facilitated through her (act of) death. Thus, by positioning herself as the site of the audience's desire Fusco attempts to expose a discourse which acknowledges female creativity only when silenced and contained within an eroticizing gaze.

Fusco believes that by recreating a wake "all the feelings of the uncanny that direct encounters with the dead often produce would become the starting point for an emotional and intellectual exploration of the issues I raise" (*www.thing.net~coco fusco*). Again, Fusco attempts to tap into the familiar yet repressed (Freud 241) ideas and feelings of her audience to incite an exploration of the necrophilia that accompanies the

recognition of particular bodies. The living diorama is critical to that aim. It is my opinion that with *Better Yet When Dead* Fusco has found the perfect vehicle to explore the ironies and paradoxes of the ideal of Latina femininity. Fusco's interactive diorama creates a dialogue in which the spectator is invited to reconsider his/her relationship to the dead female. By [re]creating a wake and using her own body to signify the deceased, Fusco positions the women as the 'living' dead, referencing their constant presence in contemporary culture as 'better yet when dead'. By positioning her spectator as not only witness but participant in that act of necrophilia, Fusco incites a critical engagement of her issues as the spectator attempts to understand his/her role in the event.

The following description of the piece is taken from a review of the YYZ performance by Rebecca Todd and Hilary Thompson in *Parachute* (1997):

> A small darkened room is hung with lush black velvet, set up for a wake. Waxy white carnations are placed in large bouquets, lit by white candles. Incense is chokingly thick. Small shelves, each holding an icon placed underneath a hanging text, are placed around the side of the room like reliquaries containing the special effects of saints. A soundtrack of voices muttering prayers creates an abstract aural landscape, something like the roar of traffic or surf. A large white casket is placed along one side of the room with the top half of the lid open. Coco Fusco lies in the coffin. . . . Viewers speak in hushed voices and tend to fall into a circular perambulation, first paying respects to the body, perhaps placing a carnation in the casket, then viewing the text and icons that line the other three walls. A nun (Kim Sawchuk) says a rosary for the deceased and watches the audience. Occasionally she picks out someone and hands her a

prayer book. (67)

This prayer book contained the fifteen mysteries of the rosary but the references to the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ were substituted by facts of five different women's lives and deaths. The icons and text the authors mention were 'shrines' to those five women-- Sor Juana, Frida Kahlo, Eva Perón, Ana Mendieta and Selena Perez-- and Fusco was dressed as one of them. She remained motionless and unresponsive in the coffin; having learned to "slow down [her] breathing to the point where it was barely perceptible, to control muscular twitches, and to withstand having limbs fall asleep" (*Bodies* 22). Todd and Thompson maintain that this simulation of a Catholic wake "invite[d] participation and a certain attitude of reverence" (67). Indeed, the macabre atmosphere invites a particular attitude of solemnity.

In "Agency and Ambivalence: A Reading of Works by Coco Fusco" Caroline Vercoe remarks,

> [In *Better Yet When Dead*] Fusco creates a contemplative space in which viewers are invited to interact and quietly consume the dead body of the Other. The coffin acts as a poignant metaphor for the containment of the display of non-Western voices and bodies, and the construction of popular cultural myths relating to women and martyrdom. (238)

This contemplative space, however, is more than an opportunity for Fusco to present her audience with the 'results' of a marginalizing discourse on Latina women (their containment and eventual demise). For if Fusco was simply presenting her celebrities in a metaphor of containment, a funeral would have been similarly appropriate choice, and it would have allowed for Fusco to be in better control of the experience to dictate meaning.

Instead, Fusco chose to stage a wake which facilitates and encourages audience

participation-- an interaction that is critical to her aims. Meant to "encourage people to gather, grieve, comfort each other, celebrate the life of the departed beloved and help the bereaved look forward to the life of the world to come" (Rogers 1), wakes allow for interaction between the corpse and the viewers; participants can speak, pray aloud, sing, and execute any final farewells in an effort to feel at peace with the situation. *Better Yet When Dead* not only allows the audience to role play their position in the wake, it relinquishes a critical degree of control of the performance to the spectators.

This detail is crucial to Fusco's ability to create a dialogue which positions the spectator as interpreter. I draw upon performance theorist Josette Féral's article "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified" to discuss the effect of Fusco's aesthetic upon the spectator's position in *Better Yet When Dead.* This article, a result of Féral's analytical work on the position of the subject in representation was published in 1982 by *Modern Drama*, and offers explanations of the emerging aspects of performance in opposition to the traditions of theatre. While dated, this paper articulates certain contentions about performance that hold important implications for the spectator in Fusco's piece. Féral describes true performance's "essential foundations" as a manipulation of body, a manipulation of space, and a relationship that subsequently develops between spectator and performer as a result of this manipulation (Féral 171). I will explore *Better Yet When Dead* in relation to these characteristics of performance to demonstrate how Fusco disrupts the passive gaze of the viewer and in so doing negates the process of dictating a particular experience or meaning. As such, the interpretation of the spectator implicates him/her in either an affirmation or a disavowal of the necrophilia enacted upon the women.

First I will explore Féral's observations on the manipulation of the performer's

body. According to Féral, the body in performance is used by the performer "the way a painter does . . . his canvas (171)". It is "conspicuous . . . a body the performance conceives of as repressed and tries to free" (171). In *Better Yet When Dead* Fusco manipulates her own body to the point of it becoming foreign even to herself. As she slows down her breath, controls reflexes and denies impulses, she is presented a new awareness of her medium: "I heard the internal workings of my body for the first time in years" (Fusco, *Bodies*, 24). Féral states, "Performance rejects illusion . . . and attempts instead to call attention to certain aspects of the body. . . that would normally escape notice" (171). Fusco's body in performance is particularly conspicuous: her ability to control urges (such as twitching or coughing) and withstand physical interference by the audience (poking her, kissing her) demonstrates an incredible discipline. As the logistics of the piece continually resurface through the aesthetic, *Fusco* is ever present: the audience is aware of the performer as much as they are aware of her 'celebrity' persona. Fusco's body in performance is thus a deliberate disavowal of illusion as Fusco is not attempting to 'fool' her audience into believing she is dead. Indeed, the spectator's ability to explore the issues Fusco identifies depends upon the knowledge that Fusco is not dead, but that she is playing at death for reasons they must discern.

This is no easy task, for as in *Two Amerindians*, Fusco has placed herself as the voiceless other, leaving interpretation to her spectators. The construction of her piece thus confounds many spectators' expectations of performance. Karen Gaylord describes the role of the spectator in a theatrical event:

> [T]he spectator serves as a psychological participant and empathetic collaborator in the maintenance and 'truth' of the fictive world onstage . . . the theatrical occasion involves a double consciousness for all concerned.

> The performance takes place on at least two levels of 'reality' simultaneously and within at least two frames. The outer frame always embraces both audience and performers. The inner frame demarcates the playing space. (as quoted in Bennett, *Theatre Audiences* 139)

Better Yet When Dead effectively coalesces the two frames Gaylord has described. In order to be a spectator to a theatrical event, the audience must provide the psychological participation and empathy which allows for a suspension of disbelief. Fusco has devised the playing space to facilitate this first frame: she has attempted to provide for her audience an authentic experience of a wake. However, the inner frame-- the playing space-- has also been offered up to the audience. As such, in order to be a spectator in *Better Yet When Dead*, one must also become a participant in the action. And because Fusco is inanimate, the spectators are the operative participants in the piece. This detail recalls Féral's observations on the manipulation of space: "space no longer surrounds and encloses the performance, but like the body, becomes part of the performance to such an extent that it cannot be distinguished from it. It *is* the performance" (original emphasis 173). In *Better Yet When Dead*, the performance space is more than a context for the performance; the audience experiences the space as action; and their functioning position in that space implicates them in the execution of the piece.

The passive view of the spectator is therefore denied as he/she is required to interact within the playing space in order to bear witness to the performance. The compulsion to engage the performance is enhanced by the fact that there is a spectator of the spectators. The presence of the actor playing nun who watches the audience as she speaks the rosary indicates that the spectator has an audience of his/her own. The performance of *Better Yet When Dead* for all concerned--performers and audience/

performers alike-- is dictated by audience response. If the situation becomes melodramatic, sacrilegious, or intensely sadistic for example, the audience is culpable. Fusco recounts,

> . . . in Canada people tended to be a little bit flipped, all their cultural baggage about death would come out, and they'd step back and be a little weirded out. And then some would come and poke me, and a couple of people tried to kiss me. But in Columbia, particularly in Medellin, which is kind of like the 'City of Death'... where violent death is a way of life, people were cavorting with me as a corpse in a way that I couldn't have imagined, trying to pull me out of the coffin, pouring wine down my mouth. A woman would come every night and read me the same set of poems about death, read them into my ear, tell me that I was in some kind of zen state and that she knew that I couldn't really communicate with her, but that she was communicating with me. (*www.moma.org/onlineprojects/conversations/trans_cfusco.html*)

While many contemporary performances no longer maintain a complete separation (cognitively, not physically) of audience from playing space, the positioning of the audience in Fusco's piece does more than affirm the following: "The 'receiver' of any 'message' is never passive. . . . but is an active producer of meanings" (Gardner interpreting/defending Brecht's aesthetic, Bennett 30). While Gardner surely refers to the cognitive processes that accompany each spectator's experience of a theatrical event, the 'impassivity' of Fusco's spectator extends to the playing space itself.

The manipulation of Fusco's body and the playing space thus create a relationship between spectator and performance that is distinctive, and critical to Fusco's

aims. The delineations of performer/performance, playing space/viewing space and spectator/ spectacle become blurred as each individual's encounter with the diorama alters the performance. Féral states, "the absence of narrativity (continuous narrativity, that is) is one of the dominant characteristics of performance". In *Better Yet When Dead* there is no continuous narrativity, only a narrative which occurs at the point of contact between performer and spectator. This holds important implications for the spectator: because Fusco is inanimate and mute, it is the responsibility of the spectator to discern the meaning of the narrative that his/her presence constructs. Féral asserts "performance does not aim at a meaning, but rather makes meaning insofar as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject will eventually emerge" (173). If *Better Yet When Dead* has no *singular* meaning to dictate it is because it offers itself to continual reformulation and renewal with each spectator's encounter in which meaning is assembled. The construction of the playing/viewing space combined with Fusco's presence undermines the spectator's comfortable position of passive viewer and thrusts her into a spectacle/spectator exchange which positions the spectator as voyeur and/or critical interpreter. In order to avoid affirming the necrophilia inherent in the piece, the spectator must critically engage with the elements of the wake to discern an alternate meaning.

As such, my own interpretation of the aesthetic stems from an effort to position myself outside of the voyeurism that the interaction demands. I acknowledge that my position as an educated, non-Catholic white female incites me to read the piece in a way that is not indicative of every spectator's interpretation. But while Fusco leaves interpretation open by placing the responsibility upon her spectator to extract meaning, there are also elements of her piece which make an alternate reading of the fetishized

subaltern accessible. While the audience member who accepts the interaction without question is implicated in the representation of the women as 'better yet when dead', the spectator who critically engages the elements in the piece finds that Fusco's artistic statement, "brilliant in life. . . [these women] were better yet when dead, and thus shine forth as stellar examples of a fate that many women share" (as quoted by Todd and Thompson 67) does not signify her approval of their current representation.

It is of particular interest to note that Fusco's performance for a Canadian audience consisted of her playing Ana Mendieta only (personal interview). While the other four celebrities were signified by the shrines located around the room, Fusco's body invoked only one of the women for the duration of the YYZ performance, which lasted from the second to the twenty-sixth of April, 1997. In Columbia, Fusco played all five of the women during the Festival Internacional. It seems as though Fusco's perceptions of her audience's familiarity with the women dictated her decisions of which celebrity to play. It seems logical that a greater recognition of the Latinas would occur in Columbia than in Canada. While Canadian spectators may have attended the performance because they recognized names such as Evita or Selena (having appeared on the silver screen) it is reasonable to assume that a select few would have knowledge of the details of each women's life and death. Ana Mendieta is certainly not a Canadian household name, and Fusco's decision to play her for an audience unversed in Mendieta's work is one clue that she is encouraging her audience to interpret the women's wake as an alternate to a moment of veneration. Having no previous knowledge of Mendieta's work, the spectator looks to the women Fusco has aligned her with to contextualize her presence.

And it is the repetition and randomness in which the women are displayed that gives way to a critical interpretation of Fusco's aesthetic. The repetition of the shrines

informs the viewer that the performance is not only about a death, it is about the death of several women, and the specificity of the shrines locates these women. Significantly, Fusco's series of wakes does not present these women in a particular order, chronologically or geographically. To the spectator unversed in Fusco's politics, it is clear that the women are comparable because of a tie that binds that is particular to the Latina identity but transgresses national boundaries and the passing of time. The repetition of the representation of the women is also a clue for those who are cognizant of the Latinas identities and legacies. Fusco's decision to present these women in the exact same context, signified by the same body (her own) indicates a particular homogeneity to the women. To the spectator familiar with the Latinas, this 'sameness' would appear unfounded. To discern Fusco's intentions in arranging the women together in this way, the text available to the viewer in the form of the prayer book becomes an important signifier.

The fragments of the women's biographies in the prayer book are presented in such a way as to "parallel the life and death of Christ . . . [m]ost of the texts articulate an idea of suffering and redemption, an ambivalence about the flesh, and a concern with death that anticipates the renown that came after death" (Todd and Thompson 67). The fore grounding of the women's anguish recalls Fusco's contention that their visibility has allowed their deaths to become "a kind of performance of female sacrifice, which relates to Marianism in Latin Catholicism, the counterpoint to machismo, which dictates that good women should be martyrs, or that through sacrifice one achieves transcendence" (Vercoe 237). This prayer book thus informs the spectator of Fusco's intent in a few ways. By equating the women with Jesus-- the embodiment of human suffering-- Fusco affirms the magnitude and significance of the women's anguish and also highlights the context in which the women's identities have been contained by Catholicism. In so doing,

a reason for the 'homogeneity' of the display is uncovered. But by identifying them as Jesus figures, Fusco also refrains from aligning them with the traditional ideal of womanhood in Catholic culture, which Mary, Mother of God, embodies.

Marina Warner, in *Alone of All Her Sex*, states "The Virgin Mary . . . is the Church's female paragon, and the ideal of the feminine personified" (xxiv). Considering that Mary is the model for her sex, it is telling that in this particularly Catholic context Fusco chooses to parallel her women's lives with that of Christ instead. The blatant appropriation of Christ's life in Fusco's prayer book calls attention to her presumption to align them with a figure different (and incidentally more divine) than the 'ideal' of womanhood in a Catholic culture. The act could even be considered blasphemous. The women's anguish and suffering is fore grounded, but it is contextualized in a masculine narrative. While the context for the women's containment is specifically Catholic, and the expression of the women's suffering illustrates the tie that binds them, the presence of Mary is conspicuously absent, and Fusco thus eschews a particular ideal of female martyrdom[5].

The shrines "like reliquaries" (Todd and Thompson 67) are designed in such a way as to parody that idea of martyrdom. Because while the icons placed at each signify the women's presence, they also recall the ways in which each woman is marginalized in the American cultural consciousness. Fusco included a quill pen for Sor Juana, a paintbrush for Frida Kahlo, a microphone for Eva Perón, a sequined bustier for Selena, and two small vials, filled with blood and dirt respectively, for Ana Mendieta. Each icon recalls the women's contributions to their areas of discipline. Sor Juana's quill symbolizes the poetry that has been translated and published worldwide since her death. Kahlo's paintbrush is emblematic of her paintings which now sell for millions and mark her work

"as belonging among the finest of her peers" (Rummel 13). Evita Perón's microphone recalls "the performativity of Evita in her legendary speeches" (Hernandez 1997), which has since been the subject of a major Hollywood movie. Selena's bustier recalls her identity as performer, which has since been turned into a multi-million dollar industry by the sale of 'Selena paraphernalia' (Anijar 92). The vials of blood and dirt recall the aesthetic of the work of Ana Mendieta, which now offers the art world examples of expensive, mystic genius (Perreault 9). While the various items signify the women's careers and areas of discipline, they also signify the means by which the women have entered a market of consumption and exchange in the American cultural consciousness. The women are recognizable by icons because their images have been turned into that which can be commodified-- movies, CDs, posters, books, paintings. As the recognition of Fusco's icons is enhanced by their presence in an arena of commodification, the shrines stand as ironic reminders of the ways in which the women have been further martyred by a process of commodification.

Fusco implicates her audience in that consumption of the women as cultural icons. Spectators pay to see the dead celebrity, and in some cases pay again, day after day, witnessing the celebrity's 'defining moment'. Fusco states that in Medellin, "because I was the only [living] dead thing in the whole biennial there was a whole line of people going to see the live woman being a dead body" (*www.moma.org/onlineprojects*). Significantly, the implications of Fusco's performance as interactive, in which the narrative begins at the point of contact between spectator and celebrity persona parallels the way in which the women as cultural contributors can be usurped by the 'highest bidder'. For just as the spectator interprets the meaning of Fusco's piece through his interaction with the body, the consumer of the cultural icon is able to 'interpret' the image

of the celebrity for particular purposes.

Fusco considers this phenomenon a means to appropriate the women's images. She states: "Scores of (mostly white) feminists artists have claimed affinities to Ana, and have invoked her name as a metaphor for female victimization . . . There are more than a few of Ana's colleagues who . . . find the current appropriation of her image painful and even exploitative" (*English Is* 125). This convenient use of Mendieta's image demonstrates how an image, once commodified, enters into an unregulated arena which can distort and refashion that image for various purposes, however removed from the actual intentions of the artist. The women's presence in an arena of consumption and exchange affirms Fusco's observation that "death becomes a kind of opportunity to really commodify to an incredibly degree the images of these women" (*www.moma.org/ onlineprojects/conversations*). By allowing her spectator their own moment of consumption, Fusco illustrates how the exchange of the Latina women as commodities can intensify an hegemonic gaze.

While Fusco's piece is jammed packed with cultural signifiers, it is in the residual spaces of the elements of the piece in which subversive meaning can be discerned. Todd and Thompson maintain, "Absence creates the desire to fill the gaps with myth, icons, texts" (67). Fusco's decision to let her audience fill those 'gaps' parallels the way in which the women's absence has already been filled by their deification in death. As their cultural contributions have been 'discovered' posthumously, the moment of the women's death has become a far more important defining moment of their 'worth' than any instance in their lives. By making each individual spectator's presence the instigating factor in the performance, Fusco allows her spectator to reexamine his/her relationship to the deceased and the cult of celebrity that follows each woman. Eloy J. Hernandez, in his

review of the YYZ performance, observes, "Adoring fans in the art gallery implicated themselves in the logic of necrophilia, the celebrity culture's disavowed basis" (1997). Because the position of the spectator as participant automatically implicates him/her as voyeur, an attempt to disavow this position leads to an exploration of the issues Fusco hopes to foreground.

The construction of the piece thus allows for the process of necrophilia to be repudiated through a process of critical engagement with Fusco's aesthetic. As the spectator attempts to discern his/her 'role' in the event, the elements in Fusco's piece become keys to Fusco's intentions. As the spectator interacts with the shrines, coffin and prayer book, an exploration of the implications of the necrophilia inherent in the piece is possible. The homogeneity and randomness in which the women are presented recalls celebrity culture's affirmation that the women's violent death is proof of their significance as cultural contributors. The pervasiveness of the women's anguish in the piece indicates Fusco's engagement with this idea of female suffering as virtue. The inclusion of the prayer book, which aligns the women with the masculine ideal, deliberately subverts the idea of female martyrdom within the exact context the concept has been developed. And the shrines display stereotypical elements to signify the women's presence, parodying the way in which their commodification marginalizes their intentions and identities.

Fusco has chosen her celebrities for the necrophilia acted upon them in two ways: one, in the reconstruction of their identities within their own communities, and two, in the commodification of their images in contemporary American culture. If the elements in Fusco's piece which exploit the women's suffering and celebrity status are explored for alternate purposes to veneration, it becomes clear that Fusco's wake is an ironic commentary on the processes of necrophilia which contain the women in a perpetual

state of 'live' death. Indeed, Fusco's piece illustrates that death is relative; by placing her women in the context of a wake, Fusco refers to the present state of the identities of the women as they are continually circulated and fetishized within the cultural consciousness.

Significantly, Fusco deliberately risks the misconstruction that her purpose is a simple veneration of the Latinas. The position of the spectator as participant subjects the performance of *Better Yet When Dead* to continual reformulation. But though Fusco refuses to dictate meaning, evidence of her intentions can be discerned by the inclusion of particular elements in her piece. The various narratives that occur during the interaction of the spectators with the aesthetic are the manifestation of a dialogue which encourages a critical engagement with the issues Fusco foregrounds. The eroticization of women in death is exposed as Fusco places herself as the sight of the spectator's consumption and desire. And by positioning herself as the voiceless other, Fusco places the responsibility with the spectator to either accept his/her position as voyeur/necrophile, or attempt to reconstruct that position. In the attempt to find new meaning beyond a celebration of female suffering and death, the spectator is able to uncover the ironic and subversive nature of the piece. In *Better Yet When Dead*, Fusco has created an aesthetic that highlights the paradoxes of the ideal of Latina femininity and exposes how deeply ingrained these ideas remain in contemporary culture.

Notes

[1] The construction of the YYZ space is described as follows:

> In 1979, a group of young artists got together with the intent of exhibiting work which was not being shown by commercial galleries and institutions. YYZ Artists' Outlet distinguished itself through strong, innovative programming that sought to combine theory and practice and to encourage dialogue between a variety of communities and audiences. (*www.yyzartistsoutlet.org*)

While the piece at YYZ was an installation that lasted several days (the coffin remained empty after Fusco's performance), this chapter is concerned solely with the piece's function as performance, and as such will not discuss the installation in any detail.

[2] Fusco then performed a loose variation on this installation at the Galeria Tejadillo 214 in Havana, 1998 entitled *El Ultimo Deseo* (The Last Wish): a site-specific performance about the death and repatriation of exiled Cubans.

[3] Fusco cites may examples particular to Latin cultures which illustrate the systematic repression of women: illegal abortion, fathers automatically awarded custody, rape and sexual harassment charges dismissed by authorities (*Bodies* 22).

[4] Fusco here refers to her history of collaborations with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, as described in the 'Notes' section of chapter one.

[5] As the figure of Mary in a Catholic culture dictates the image of ideal womanhood to which females can aspire, so does it influence perceptions of what celebrity status must entail. Marina Warner in *Alone of All Her Sex* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), details the formation of Mary's identity which corresponds to four dogmatic principles: Mary's divine motherhood and virginity, the immaculate conception, and the assumption of her body and soul into heaven. Marianism-- the cult of devotion to Mary-- has its inception in Byzantine times and corresponds historically with a growing regard for female anguish as virtue. The pervasiveness of Marianism in contemporary Latin culture seems to have helped inform Fusco's celebrity choices. A close look at each of the women's celebrity personas reveals that their posthumous identities are reminiscent of the characteristics of Mary in various ways. Sor Juana, who died serving others recalls the suffering and nurturing that the narrative of Mary's life conveys. The fixation on maternal Mary which invokes the sentiment that a good woman is a mother, and that therefore all women of repute will aspire to be mothers, is reflected in the common misconception that Frida Kahlo's inability

to bear a child was her fixation (Martha Zamora, *Frida Kahlo: The brush of anguish*. Trans. Marilyn Sode Smith. [San Fransisco: Chronicle, 1990] 91).The role of the 'virgin martyr'-- which Mary epitomizes-- gained increasing importance as the Church expanded its influence. Selena as Tejana-Madonna is a similar martyr: her death guaranteed her an identity of purity and goodness:

> What became most venerated about Selena's life was her strong tie to the Tejano community and to her family, her innocence her spirituality, and her life after death, not her skimpy costumes, her sensuality, or the scandals that surrounded her family life. (Karen Anijar, "Selena-- Prophet, Profit, Princess". *God in the Details.* Eds. Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy [New York: Routledge, 2000] 95)

Mary's Assumption, in which soul is returned to her body to circumvent any denial of her humanity (Warner 85) solidifies her earthly beginnings so as not to usurp the divinity of Christ. Mary's *bodily* form as paramount to her identity as the divine yet accessible (earthly) is reflected in the fervour surrounding Eva Perón's corpse, which enjoyed an intercontinental tour as disputes raged over who had the greater claim to the body (Taylor 68). Just as Mary's bodily form is testament to her particular kind of divinity (one sacred but unable to surpass the blessedness of Christ), Evita's "intact body parallels the identical symbol of sanctity and triumph over death of other saints and martyrs" (Taylor 147). Mary is often viewed as the go-between; she is the intervener on behalf of those unfavoured by God. "she mediates between heaven and earth. . . she listens to the implorations of mankind . . . and promises to ease their pain" (Warner 285). In a similar vein, Ana Mendieta's work now seems to offer an alleviation of spiritual anxiety, made possible through the ritualistic practices from which her art arose: "[her work] offers to heal the breach between humanity and the non-human world" (Perreault 9). In my exploration of contemporary perceptions of the women, I find that Marianism has infiltrated the identities of these Latina celebrities from various eras and countries in particular ways, such that the women have actually gained new identities through death.

Virtual Commodities: Representing the Invisible
in *The Incredible Disappearing Woman*

The Incredible Disappearing Woman is Fusco's latest work. The play script for this piece, completed in 2000, appears in Fusco's most recent publication *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings*. A version of this piece recently played at the House of World Cultures for Berlin's In Transit Festival in June 2003 and is scheduled to play at the TBA Festival in Portland, September 2003[1]. *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* is a one-act play which illustrates Fusco's astute observations on the subaltern female as fetishized in life and eroticized in death, and foregrounds the implications of this body being caught in a cycle of exchange and consumption in the new digital age. As Fusco's piece demonstrates, the imperialist gaze which has traditionally identified the non-white female as an exotic yet entirely disposable entity intensifies as that body appears more frequently in the public spheres of the international market.

This play focuses specifically on the status of subaltern female workers in the Mexican/American free trade zone. Fusco began creating the work after conducting research upon women *maquiladora*[2] workers in the US- Mexico border zone and the Caribbean. Subaltern women occupy a position in the global market which exposes them to horrific labour conditions, denies them reparation, and retains maximum productivity for the benefit of the 'virtual class'[3]. While domination over the subaltern through forced labour is not a new phenomenon, Fusco identifies today's information age as executing much more subtle methods of exploitation than ever before. She states, "Colonialism abjected the subaltern body through militarism, forced labor, and scientific objectification- - new technologies elaborate and diversify these strategies of domination" (*Bodies* xvi). The elaboration and diversification techniques Fusco speaks of are located in the positioning of the virtual class versus those without access to the advancing technology.

Here I refer to Rosemary Hennessey's contention quoted in the introduction to this thesis and reiterate my understanding that hegemonic ideologies secure their dominance by asserting racial, gendered, and sexual differences (23). Fusco is concerned with the ability of virtual technology to reinforce those differences at the same time as it purports to transcend the boundaries of identity. According to this claim of transcendence, the constructs of gender, race, and class which have evolved to be definitive of identity -- which now distinguish the 'centre' in opposition to the 'periphery'-- supposedly become obsolete in the new, 'border-less' cyberage. To give a sense of the logic behind this claim, I draw attention to a fairly standard argument against the existence of cultural imperialism in our virtual globe.

Such an argument maintains that a de-centralization of power (knowledge sources) inherent in the operation of the internet results in an 'unbiased' exchange of ideas; it negates the usual uni-directional flow from the core to the periphery[4]. According to this view, the attitudes and experiences of the inhabitants of the virtual globe can not be influenced by a particular set of ideologies since they search out information at will and can freely express their own views via the technology. While this perspective is inherently flawed because it relies on the assumption that all people, everywhere, have equal access to the internet, it also overlooks the dangers of the deregulation of 'knowledge sources'. For while enthusiasts of the digital age insist that violent abuses upon bodies and territories cease to occur in a domain in which such things are intangibilities, the plethora of websites that rely on sexual and racial stereotypes for their legitimacy indicates that quite the opposite is easily facilitated. Indeed, an abundance of sex tourism, rape, and racial hate websites indicate that the internet is used to promote actual acts of opportunistic violence upon human bodies. And beyond encouraging sex

tourism or cultural stereotypes, there is also more violence inherent in the logistics of an advancing digital age than meets the privileged eye.

In *Bodies*, Fusco has identified a particularly effective way in which the digital revolution participates in re-distinguishing bodily identities and territorial boundaries: by constructing a world labour pool of poor non-white workers to manufacture the technology. She states, "The world inside the screen may allow us to envision ourselves without bodies, but its images, the machines, and their users are embedded in material relations; and digital technology is a market-driven phenomenon that organizes our vision in the era of multinational capitalism, with global economic ramifications" (*Bodies* 192). These global economic consequences penetrate most insidiously the material conditions surrounding the subaltern worker who is systematically denied methods of self-determination, legal or otherwise. As such, the methods of production which enable the digital revolution perpetuate a history of the repression of the non-white body.

This issue was central to Fusco's concerns as she sought a method to respond to the digital age/craze through her performance techniques. For Fusco, the faces behind the methods of production of our cyberculture must enter into discussions and responses to the developing alter-reality that is the digital age. By overlooking the sociopolitical conditions which enable the advancement of the new age, the 'developed' world blindly perpetuates its history of exploitation. Fusco qualifies her condemnation of the digital age stating, "What I want to suggest here is that while there are certain narratives linking the subaltern with technology that do confirm the democratic potential of the digital revolution, they are most appealing precisely because they enhance rather than disrupt its emancipatory script" (*Bodies* 193). I take this statement to mean that while technology appears to increase democracy by maximizing choice available to the user, it also

reinscribes consumeristic values in order to perpetuate itself. The emancipatory rhetoric thus reflects a drive for economic profit-- its virtual lifeblood-- rather than a concern with enlightening and/or liberating the inhabitants of our Global Village.

Subaltern women are an increasing part of this equation of productivity, profit, and disseminated information. Women workers in the free trade zone, who have virtually no access to the internet, are a critical component of the digital age. Their low-wage jobs maximize profit for multi-national companies while providing the 'virtual class' with accelerated and inexpensive technology. Fusco's research on maquiladoras uncovered that unexplained disappearances are particular to these areas where scores of 'disposable' workers vie for coveted jobs. Women workers account for the majority of these disappearances. The disregard for human dignity and safety that typifies the labour relations that ensnare the non-white female is a reality to which Fusco felt compelled to respond. Fusco has dedicated her play "to the memory of the 220 women, most of whom were maquiladora workers, who disappeared from the city of Juárez[5] between 1993 and 1999" (*Bodies* 197). *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* is a piece which clears a space to speak the unspeakable and to represent the unrepresentable. It offers stories which are excluded from dominant discourses, and in so doing situates the spectator as witness to an existent and problematic reality. A marxist-feminist analysis informs my close reading of Fusco's playtext in its attempt to represent the subaltern female as more than a nameless commodity.

In *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* Fusco presents the audience with various instances of female disappearance and foregrounds the issue of artistic representation in regards to female invisibility. Fusco's play is centred around the exploits of a performance artist who has taken advantage of the phenomenon of the 'disappeared' in

order to execute his 'art'. She came upon the story, which forms the basis of her play, while travelling the United States in 1998:

> I heard a story about an art event that took place in 1980 in which a male artist in Los Angeles underwent a vasectomy-- as performance art-- and videotaped it for public viewing. As a prelude to this technological intervention upon his own body, he confessed that he had deposited his last seed in the body of a dead woman. To obtain the body, he crossed the border into Mexico. According to his account, he paid $80 for one hour of access to a female cadaver and complied with his procurers' requirement that he make no visual record of his sex act, but he did make an audiotape. (*Bodies* 195)

Fusco has recreated this 'performance' (by performance artist John Duncan[6]) by staging a diorama within the world of the play. The inclusion of her signature aesthetic form, this time combined with a multi-media element makes the play distinctly Fusco's. The referent of the actual event gives the play a nightmarish quality and will be discussed in regards to Fusco's intentions after the development of the mise-en-scene has been analyzed.

I begin my close reading of the play text with Fusco's description of the stage:

> *The set consists of a diorama inside a contemporary art museum in Southern California . . . The back wall facing the audience is a rear projection screen. When there is no moving projection, what one sees on the back wall is a large photograph from the 1970s, a portrait of a white man in a donkey mask . . . Upstage right, set at a diagonal to the audience is an old medical table with a lifesize female mannequin on it, covered by a*

> *white sheet . . . Just beyond the doorway, stage left, is a small anteroom. The three custodial workers are sitting there conversing as the action begins. On the screen, we see a museum curator materialize with three docents.* (*Bodies* 202[7])

As the museum curator on screen begins to speak, the audience finds out that the museum is celebrating an opening by staging various exhibitions. One of the exhibits belongs to a performance artist, Donald Horton, who has returned to the United States after twenty years of self-exile to explain and defend his installation: a diorama with soundscape that offers 'proof' of his sexual interaction with a Mexican corpse.

The museum curator explains to her docents that the museum has staged a diorama to "help [the] audiences imagine a moment in the history of performance art" (203). As we have seen in the previous chapters, dioramas provide a space both authentic and counterfeit, piquing the interest of the viewer precisely because of its uncanny resemblance to reality (Scholette 2). By including the diorama in her set, Fusco exposes her theatre audience to the exhibit in the same manner in which the play's museum patrons will be exposed. Fusco's audience is invited to engage in the pleasure of viewing, to enter into the play upon fiction/reality which the diorama facilitates. This is a critical component of Fusco's aesthetic, for as we will see, the audience's engagement with the diorama will facilitate their acceptance of the custodial workers forthcoming stories.

At this time, the audience is introduced to the only 'live' characters: Magaly, Chela and Dolores, all Latina women who work at the museum. As they wait outside for the on-screen curator to finish her lecture, they learn about the 'performance' to which the diorama refers. The interaction between the live characters and those on the projection screen is initially a bit jarring. The characters accept the interaction without hesitation--

"*Chela waves a rag she has in her hand in circles as if to indicate to the curator to hurry up and finish*" (203)-- and in so doing, invite the audience to do the same. It is the first time that Fusco encourages her audience to assume that the characters on stage can interact directly with the on-screen projection. As the curator speaks, Fusco invites her audience to connect the Latinas with the object in Horton's piece in the following manner:

> *Magaly puts her cigarette out on the bottom of her shoe, and then continues to try to straighten out her pantyhose. Chela realizes that she needs to lift her skirt to fix the hose, so she gets up and holds a towel in front of Magaly so Magaly can raise her skirt up.* (203)

Magaly struggles to lift her skirt as the curator explains, "[the artist] had gone to Mexico in search of a dead woman so that he could, uh, well, ejaculate into her" (203). The image of Magaly's state of undress with a towel bisecting her body coupled with the disclosure of the artist's act of violation, creates an element of anticipation in regards to Magaly's fate[8].

When the curator and docents leave the projection, the three women are left alone in the diorama to prepare it for public viewing. Dolores soon feels faint and moves the mannequin from the bed to lie down. As she recovers, Magaly voices her aversion to the display stating "I find nothing redeeming in this" (204). Chela suggests that one of them take the place of the mannequin under the white sheet, where Dolores lays, in order to give that "little machito[9] of an artist a heart attack" (204). At Chela's insistence, the women begin to discuss the idea of executing a sort of revenge upon the artist by feigning death. As Magaly explains what will happen if Dolores plays the corpse, a projection begins on screen that plays out the scene she describes. Horton and his audience file in as Magaly announces their entrance. Here again the audience is given the sense that the live

characters have a direct relationship with the on-screen action. When Magaly says, "And then Mr. Horton says, 'Thank you very much, I'm very excited to be here.'" (207), the on-screen Horton continues the speech that describes and explains his installation.

If the audience is anticipating a satisfactory explanation of Horton's motivations at this point-- if they are hoping to 'understand' his act-- they are quickly disappointed. Horton begins his explanation of the piece by admitting personal failure as a motivator: "I was having some trouble with my personal relationships and I finally decided I was going to do something very extreme to my body" (207). This confession initiates Horton's unimpressive account of his artistic vision, and it only becomes more self-indulgent and ludicrous. He states, "Some other artist in uh, Vienna, had already castrated himself, so I decided to get a little operation. And that was before Orlan started having doctors operate on her as art, by the way. But I wanted to do more than that" (207). He describes his hunt for a corpse in a flippant manner, quickly glossing over the fact that he found his 'connection' in a shop run by a man who sells the bodies of children to sexual perverts. He describes the Mexican woman as one might describe livestock: "She must have been in her 30s, dark curly hair, fleshy but not fat, no visible wounds" (207). The account ends when the piercing audio tape of Horton's performance runs its course, but Magaly has a detailed imagining of what Horton's reaction to Dolores as the corpse will entail:

> he's going to come back, alone . . . He knows you're not a mannequin and he's curious to know who you are . . . When you don't move, he's going to step away and check to see if he can lock himself in . . . Then he'll run his hand over the sheet again, and touch your hair. He'll feel that you're still warm and then he will hesitate, and then pull off the sheet covering you, so he can gaze at you, once again . . . you can pull back . . . I promise

you, he will scream! (208)

Dolores is horrified at the artist's demeanour and action and it seems reasonable to assume that the audience is left similarly horrified. Fusco has constructed Horton's character in such a way as to negate any credibility he might claim. For the audience, Horton's piece is nothing more than an act to "push [him]self and everyone else over the edge" (220). His reference to the Viennese artist is almost laughable, and indicates that Horton's only true motivating desire is to out avant garde the avant garde[10]. Instead of appearing as an intelligent perpetrator of revolutionary work, as one might expect to be showcased in a museum, Horton is simply someone who decided he "was going to do something very extreme to [his] penis" (220). And Magaly's description of his reaction paints him as a necrophile out of sexual desire, and not out of some obscure concern for 'art'. To further cement the grotesqueness of his character, Fusco signifies Horton's presence (when he is not projected on screen) by the portrait of a man in a donkey mask. Horton does not appear as an artist of revolutionary acclaim or a noteworthy contributor to artistic development. By characterizing Horton in this way, Fusco encourages the audience to dismiss his intent of the diorama, thus stripping it of its original meaning. Yet because the play has only begun, and because the action of the characters centres around the diorama, it seems this diorama must hold some alternate purpose. While it is impossible to predict each spectator's reaction, it is reasonable to expect that the disruption of this narrative incites the audience to contemplate the diorama as a site of new meaning. As such, the audience is left to wonder how *these* women in *this* diorama will contribute to the development of the play.

The women's stories that follow this interaction inform the audience that the Latinas share more in common than their occupations. Fusco has in fact provided her

audience with various, living embodiments of the Incredible Disappearing Woman. The women disclose their very personal stories in the 'privacy' of their group, each taking their turn at replacing the mannequin on the diorama, and the audience essentially eavesdrops on the women's stories of abuse. As they share their tales it becomes clear that neither Magaly, Chela nor Dolores are strangers to the idea of being inanimate or dead objects. Alternate meanings for the diorama transpire as the audience learns how each of the women have already been positioned, literally, as the 'disappeared'.

The diverse stories allow the characters to be placed on a continuum which resists offering an essential 'subaltern experience' but allows a broader look into the ways globalization increases the abjection of non-white females. Despite their differences, each woman's existence is defined only by her exchange value. According to Marx, "On the basis of political economy itself . . . the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and indeed becomes the most wretched of commodities" (Renton 111). Fusco's women are not only commodities because they labour within a capitalist structure, they are also commodities because their sexual identities are defined within that structure. Jill Dolan states, "females are fashioned into genderized products that are exchanged on a political economy that benefits men" (11). A continuum illustrates the exchange of these women as capital in the home, in the workplace, and on an international scale.

On one end of this commodity continuum is Dolores; an uneducated, naive El Salvadorean who suffers from fainting spells. When she faints upon the corpse's table in the diorama, Chela recounts Dolores' history to Magaly. Dolores' story demonstrates the female body as capital in the private sphere of the home. Fusco positions Dolores as the object of domestic abuse-- a reality she has identified as problematic in Latin American culture. We understand that Dolores is abused when she explains her husband's reactions

to her fainting spells, "He kept complaining. I prayed. He tried to hit me while I was unconscious but he could never wake me up. Sometimes afterwards I would have red marks all over my face. See this (*points to a scar on her face*)" (209). As Dolores' affliction has hindered her ability to provide the "invisible labor" (Hennessey 98[11]) within the home which signifies her identity and worth as wife, she is a worthless commodity to her husband.

Her fainting spells have also provided the opportunity for her 'confessor' to sexually assault her. Dolores, however, refuses to acknowledge the reality of her abuse, using the story of Saint Teresa as a fantastical imagining of her own experience:

> In his hands I saw a long spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire . . . with this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it, and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. (*Bodies* 205)

Magaly is confounded at Dolores' naiveté, asking "You mean she doesn't know". Chela responds, "Of course not. She thinks an Angel visited her with a golden spear, remember?" (209). Hennessey's contention: "The pervasiveness of rape and wife-battering across classes and races . . . demonstrate[s] the systematic persistence of patriarchy" (24) expands Dolores' ordeal to the experience of women worldwide. Here, Fusco specifically implicates Catholicism in that patriarchal dominance which maintains its position by oppressing women through material conditions and social relations.

When Dolores' husband learns of the priest's transgression upon his wife, he "beat her really badly . . . I think his family sent her here to get rid of her after that" (209). Dolores is forced to disappear from the private sphere she inhabits because she no

longer retains her worth in the construct of that sphere. As her body has been consumed by an individual outside of her designated arena of exchange, the ownership of her body has become ambiguous; her body has thus lost its potency as a symbol of exchange. The fact that Dolores is too frightened to play the corpse indicates that she has some knowledge of the sexual abuse she has suffered, despite her attempts to refute it. If the audience is sympathetic to Dolores' story of abuse, their anticipation of the execution of the trick is certainly augmented at this point.

When Dolores cannot bring herself to play the dead body, the audience's desire for the event is sustained when Chela takes her place, "(*She scrambles onto the examining table and kicks off her shoes. She wriggles out of her uniform. . . and pulls the sheet over herself*)" (209). At Dolores' insistence, Chela explains why she is so determined to 'trick' the artist. Chela's story positions her next to Dolores on the continuum of exchange. While uneducated and poor, she has an intriguing sense of self-reflexivity about her that is absent in Dolores' characterization. Her past experience positions her as an object of exchange in the public sphere, the business sector. Her story of labouring in a Mattel factory in Mexico details the conditions which incited Fusco's decision to create the play: it is a recount of the horrors of maquiladora labour with a bizarre and slightly unbelievable twist.

Chela admits to Dolores that she initially accepted a job at Mattel thinking "we would be making Barbies. But *we* didn't make Barbies. We had to make the little plastic wheels for the little plastic cars that Barbies drive, and their little plastic phones". The irony of the job is not lost on Chela: "Pinches[12] Barbies had cars and phones-- you think any of us there could ever buy those things?" (210). She is caught in what Marx describes as the alienation of labour and capital: to her employers, she is a cog in the machine, a

disposable entity. Her experience on the assembly line recalls Marx's contention, "The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an even cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates" (quoted in Renton 112). Chela, plagued with nightmares of the factory and sick from the plastic fumes, is trapped in labour conditions which offer death as compensation for her efforts.

When a supervisor takes interest in Chela and indicates that he "could help [her] get promoted . . . off that horrible line" (210), she is desperate for the opportunity and responds to his advances. She recounts her decision to accompany her supervisor to a hotel room and role play in his sexual fantasy. Illustrating her story, a projection begins on the screen: "*a seedy motel room with wood panelling, cigarette burns in the bedspread and a leaking faucet in the bathroom. We see the scene from Chela's perspective focused exclusively on the man*" (211). She is required to remove all of the hair on her body except for her head, so that she will appear "like a little girl"; "Como una Barbie[13]!" (211). Chela unknowingly drinks a tranquillizing drug and passes out, unclothed. Unfortunately, the drug wears off and Chela wakes before her captor is 'finished', catching him in a more than compromising position: "The guy had my shoes and stockings on, and he had my bra around his neck. Nothing else on of course. He was parading around como una loca[14]" (212). Chela recalls, "I tried not to laugh but I couldn't help myself". The man "was so hysterical he put things on inside out. . . . He just left me there naked" (212). Within two weeks, Chela is out of a job and blacklisted from the maquiladora region. She is forced to leave her child with her mother in search of employment.

In this exchange, Chela is positioned not only as the oppressed worker, not only as the body her supervisor can 'buy' off the assembly line, but also as the embodiment of

the commodity she produces. Having no access to legal recourse, Chela attempts to reclaim her image from that arena of commodity exchange by replacing the object in the diorama. When Dolores says, "So this guy, . . reminds you of your guy, right? But you weren't dead, mamita." Chela responds, "I might as well have been" (211). The disturbing truth, however, is that Chela could have escaped further persecution had she 'played dead'. Instead, she deviated from the position of the passive and unvoiced subaltern: she dared to laugh. Listening to her story, the audience learns that Chela's inability to remain a passive object of consumption jeopardized her very existence.

Magaly's story positions her on the furthest end of the continuum from Dolores. She is an educated, self-aware Chilean woman whose experience reflects a subaltern woman's commodity value on an international scale of political dealings and economic profit. After eavesdropping on Chela's story, Magaly enters the diorama to hear its conclusion. When Dolores protests Chela's motives, stating, "But Chela, this Horton guy is not your boss", Magaly affirms, "Doesn't matter. It's the talking that helps". The statement typifies Magaly's character who identifies knowledge with power and it also seems to be a reflection of Fusco's decision to create a forum for stories to be told. Magaly insists that unless Dolores face up to the reality of her abuse, "she will remain a trapped animal, just as [Chela]" (214), thus revisiting Simone de Beauvoir's contention "it is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw strength to live and our reasons for living" (as quoted by Lorde 113).

Her insistence inflames Chela, who finally decides that "Miss sabelototo" will "play la muerta[15]" (214). When Magaly protests, Chela states, "Anyways, you should do it because Dolores can't and I need to be on guard to make sure nothing really bad happens while that guy is here". Magaly is unconvinced.

MAGALY. And what do you know about playing dead right? You were knocked out and don't remember so how are you going to be convincing?

CHELA. (*Goes and stands infront of her*) Atrevida[16]! What right do you have to throw that at me?

MAGALY. And what right do you have to set me up so you can watch the scene you never saw?

CHELA. Hija de puta[17]! (*She slaps Magaly*) (214)

Magaly's accusation insults Chela but also resonates with the audience member who is anticipating an enactment of the diorama.

Magaly finally consents to be "la muerta" because she has played it before. Magaly most obviously lays claim to the alias of the Incredible Disappearing Woman. She is "the only one. . . alive because [she] knew how to play dead" (215). She is a casualty of the violently repressive Pinochet regime, having been forced to flee her country and remain 'dead' to her family for years. Magaly assumes that she was a target of the DINA death squad because she "gave literacy classes in the poblaciones" (215); her ability to educate workers beyond their marginalized existences is a threat to the exploitative capitalist regime[18]. A video projection accompanies Magaly's recount of her terrifying story in which her captors beat and strip her. Near death, she is able to survive because she learns that one of the men is a necrophile. She is told "The other guy is coming back for more of you. If you want to get through this háste la muertita[19]" (217). Magaly's recount of playing dead could be Fusco's own from her performance in *Better Yet When Dead*: "I had to let the cold air penetrate my pores and enter my blood stream. I had to hold myself stiff without appearing to make an effort" (217). Magaly is raped and dumped in a field. Though she is miraculously saved by a sympathetic family, Magaly's

story of terror does not end. She relocates to Mexico for years, until the government changes in Chile when she finally begins to feel she can "live a relatively normal life" (219). Incredibly, her captor reappears at the door to her apartment and she must flee again, using a 'coyote' to get her across the US/Mexico border.

Having played dead to escape her captors-- enduring sexual abuse as a 'corpse'-- and then having remained dead to her family for years to protect them after fleeing her home, Magaly has essentially disappeared into the realm of the dead. Her position as a potentially subversive female in a country attempting to position itself as a contending force in international dealings and profit render her a disposable commodity. She agrees to play the part of the corpse in an effort to reclaim her body from a criminal, eroticising gaze. Spectators who are sympathetic to Magaly's pain also can anticipate her ability to momentarily regain control of her representation. While the recalling of these painful memories raises the stakes for the women to avenge themselves, the absorption of the stories by the spectators also enhances their desire to witness that revenge.

The women have distinct personalities and very different histories, but have been rendered invisible in various ways. Fusco's choices reflect upon the complexities of power dynamics which silence subaltern voices and consume their bodies. The women's stories, each one more incredible than the next, are engaging and believable precisely because of the way Fusco has presented them. The story-tellers, as the only 'live' characters on stage are tangible and accessible; they are 'real' women whose stories also become real. The audience's emotional involvement has been encouraged as they anticipate the woman's ability to position themselves within the diorama. Three different dioramas are thus created which are specific to the women's terrifying stories of disappearance. The play upon fiction/reality the diorama facilitates makes each woman's

individual diorama an enactment of a plausible event.

Reminiscent of Fusco's previous installations which enclose the subaltern body and the audience within the world of a diorama, these characters appear tied emotionally and mentally to the purposes of the diorama within the play. But their stories alter the diorama such that it cannot exist as a signifier of the artist's original intentions. Horton describes the piece in the beginning of the play as an effort "to push myself and everyone else over the edge" (206). If the audience is at all intrigued to learn more, that intrigue must certainly dissolve through the course of the play as the Latinas' realities are revealed. As the women narrate and the video projection recalls the ordeal, the voices of the women remain detached from the action. The audience listens to the stories as tales told by voices of the dead, and the diorama becomes a nightmarish metaphor for the containment, rape, and exile the women have suffered.

The projection screen that accompanies Chela and Magaly's stories thus concretizes the stories for the audience while the women's voices telling the tales retain an ephemeral quality. The film further augments the horror of the tales by upsetting the traditional viewer/viewed relationship. Instead of being able to view the Latinas *in* their stories: "*We see the scene from Chela's perspective focused exclusively on the man*" (211) and we watch "*from Magaly's point of view lying on the table in the torture chamber. We see the man enter and move towards her*" (216). Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" describes the traditional object of scopophilic contact as woman who connotes 'to-be- looked-at-ness': "Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the character within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (19). Mulvey explains that this scopophilia positions the woman as devoid of an independent function. If she is not connected to the

male character, her presence is meaningless; her only function is to provoke the male protagonist's desires and activity. The male is thus the proactive figure with which the spectator identifies, and the woman remains the 'looked-at' catalyst of the male's escapades.

Fusco upsets this dynamic by denying her audience the pleasure-of-looking-at the female body on screen. By positioning the audience in the women's point of view Fusco places her on-screen females outside of the spectator's gaze which "projects its fantasy onto [their] figure[s]" (19). The audience is not able to witness the man and his relationship to the object of desire because the woman is absent from view. It is important to note that "[t]he man [on screen] controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen" (Mulvey 20). Mulvey speaks here of the function of film to reproduce a male gaze as the natural state of perception. Fusco, by allowing her audience to view the action only through Chela or Magaly's eyes, attempts to subvert that purpose. Listening to Chela's story the audience watches from her perspective and sees the man "*screaming at [her], calling [her] a perra*[20]" (212). From Magaly's perspective "*we see a man's hand holding scissors cutting up [her] pant leg*" (216). In each instance the woman's perspective is conspicuous, and the horror of the act is all the more tangible. The Latinas stories are immediate and graphic; and the audience is invited to experience them from a perspective which denies the scopophilia that marginalizes them[21].

This theatrical technique of placing the audience 'in the women's shoes' fosters an increasingly sympathetic eye to the women's situations and furthers any anticipation of the women taking their revenge. Like the characters who have been busy imagining the

artist's various reactions to their trick, the spectator who hopes for the women's success likely overlooks the possibility that the artist will not engage whatsoever in the pretence. As Magaly arranges herself on the table, Chela and Dolores hide and the video projection begins. The scene plays out as Magaly has described it: the museum guests arrive and Horton offers his absurd 'explanation' for his diorama and plays his audiotape. Yet when Horton's crowd has dispersed and the audiotape has run its course, Horton "*looks at Magaly briefly but doesn't get close to her. Instead, he pulls out a comb and runs it through his hair, then he hoists up his jeans and turns and leaves the projection*" (220). After watching the women 'interact' with the projection screen, and after witnessing the women's anguish, Horton's lack of engagement with the diorama is devastating. As the women realize they have failed in their efforts "*they look at each other sheepishly for a while*" (220), then sit together on the examination bed as the lights fade.

While it is obvious that the screen directly affects the actions and emotions of the women, it is clear that the workers have no effect upon the action on-screen, despite what the construction of the play leads the audience to assume. Because while it appears in the opening scene that Chela has 'interacted' with the curator, the curator does not actually acknowledge the interaction. Similarly, Magaly's projected version of the artist's reaction appears to be a simulation of what will occur-- but Magaly's version ends only in supposition, before the trick is enacted, and when the trick is actually played the reaction is nothing that Magaly (nor the audience) have anticipated. The interaction is in fact uni-directional, with particularly devastating consequences for the Latinas.

Fusco's decision to create her play as a multi-media performance thus provides a metaphor for the encroachment of technology upon the realities of the workers, and its implications. The museum curator, docents, guests, and artist, by failing to acknowledge

the presence of the workers, confirm Chela's observations: "When I go in to the bathrooms to put in new toilet paper, if anyone is there they don't really look at me. Some people just run out of the bathroom right away when they see me working in there" (206). In the context of the play, the female workers, though they provide a necessary service, are invisible to the on-screen characters. Similarly, the subaltern worker remains a crucial yet invisible/anonymous component in the information age.

And if the projection screen is read as symbolic of the hegemony of the digital age (the conditions of labour that are perpetuated by the technological revolution) then it is no wonder that the women's 'trick' can incite no reaction from the artist. Having no practical access to the technology which facilitates communication-- that so called 'unbiased exchange of ideas' (Kim)-- the workers remain unable to change their immediate realities. The lack of interaction revisits Spivak's observations on subaltern speech. As Spivak maintains, the problem does not lie in the subaltern's inability to speak, it exists in the absence of the listener (112). Here, the Latinas have cried out, but Horton does not engage in the act and so does not complete the transaction of communication. It appears then, that the subaltern speech presented in the play remains unable to achieve the dialogic level of utterance (Spivak 111) and that such silence is a direct result of the inaccessibility of the benefits of the digital age, the means of production, and of structures of power.

The absence of an interaction thus reflects Horton's unwillingness to acknowledge the subaltern female's attempt to reach beyond her 'boundaries'. And applying the implications of Derrida's concept of *différance* into the artist's decision indicates that Horton's lack of engagement stems from a fear of his own 'authenticity'. To revisit this concept I refer to Lawrence Grossberg's essay on identity and cultural studies. Grossberg

extends the concept of *différance* to its construction of the dominant identity by the following: "The subordinate term (the marginalized other or subaltern) is a necessary and internal force of destabilization existing within the identity of the dominant term. The subaltern here is itself constitutive of, and necessary for, the dominant term" (90). The subaltern, as definitive of all the dominant figure (the centre) is not, cannot extend beyond that definition if the centre is to retain its position. *Différance* cannot be exposed at the risk of dissolving the dominant discourse, and Horton cannot respond to the figures of abjection (the women) without legitimizing their presence. Horton's position is contingent upon the 'otherness' of the object in his performance; he cannot respond to the women's act of subversion without risking the stability of his own identity.

Rosemary Hennessey states, "Capitalist patriarchal structures help to secure an exploitative system of social differences . . . that naturalize and reproduce the asymmetrical social divisions that help to sustain, manage and maximize the appropriation of surplus labour" (25). The centre thus depends on 'otherness' to perpetuate the economic, political and social conditions which guarantee its authority. By maintaining the distinction between Horton and the women, Fusco uncovers the circumstances which aid Horton in the execution of his act, essentially dispelling any claims of creating an autonomous work of art. Horton's position as privleged white male has played a critical role in his ability to create his performance. He is able to purchase a Mexican woman's body only because subaltern women are so marginalized that their 'disappearance' goes unnoticed. The 'otherness' of these women legitimizes the view that they are cadavers to be bought and sold. The characterization of Horton, as an embodiment of the discourse which cannot accept *différance* at the expense of its own position, is therefore Fusco's comment upon "art for art's sake". Through Horton, Fusco

illustrates the trite and repulsive self-indulgence inherent in the act of this privileged and exploitative white artist.

If we examine the motives behind the actual performance to which Horton's piece refers, it appears Fusco is making a pointed comment upon the artist's integrity and responsibility to his subject matter. John Duncan describes his piece (originally titled BLIND DATE) as an experience of "indescribable intense self-disgust" which attempted "to show what can happen to men that are trained to ignore their emotions" (Stiles 1). Kristine Stiles explains Duncan's aesthetic with the following logic:

> However contemptable [sic] Duncan's desperate event, the artist presented his own excruciating lack, a psychic pain that is palpable. For such an act unfolds within the epistemological spaces insured by white male hegemony, the phallic rule which must guarantee its virility by any means. In BLIND DATE this ideal is carried to the extreme as caricature. But what it unmasked was the reality of impotence, suffering derived from the fact that while the artist embodied the representation of white maleness with all its accreted power, he psychologically cohabitated the disempowered space of the lifeless woman whom he violated, fucking himself to death: "I risked the ability to accept myself. I risked the ability to have sex...and the ability to love." (3).

Defenders of Duncan like Stiles hold his aesthetic decisions above any ethical responsibility to his subject matter. Brushing aside the sociopolitical conditions which enabled the act, these supporters focus on the performative aspect which seeks to transgress the limitations of the human body. For them, Duncan's aesthetic and his proposed intent outweigh any implications of the descecration perpetuated on the

subaltern female body[22].

The fact that the piece has an actual referent (and that the artist that Horton plays is a practicing artist in today's performance circles) indicates a particular integrity behind Fusco's aesthetic. It is clear that Fusco is not attempting to be a sensationalist; she is exposing real conditions facing (subaltern) women in today's shrinking globe. The assumption inherent in Duncan's 'transformation' is that the conditions which position the woman as a corpse to be consumed have been trangressed. Duncan views himself as the victim of his act, supposedly risking "the ability to love" by "psychologically cohabitating" the space of the subaltern woman's corpse. Assumedly, Duncan is demonstrating against white male hegemony (and the exaltation and protection of its virility) by depositing his last precious seed into a "disempowered space". But his very act is enabled by the "exploitative system of social differerces" (Hennessey 25) of the patriarchal hegemony that Duncan purports to undermine. The material conditions which enable Duncan's performance, positioning Duncan as consumer and the Mexican woman as a body to be consumed, are reflected in the horrific stories of Fusco's 'disappeared' custodial workers. As such, it is clear that the 'performance' that the diorama simulates is an act of exploitation of the 'disempowered'. While Duncan and his supporters view the identity of the corpse as inconsequential (for them it is the act which defines his aesthetic intent), Fusco's version of the events makes clear that the identity of the dead woman as subaltern female is critical. The circumstances in which her humanity has been effectively erased, that is, the unequal power dynamics which position subaltern women as coveted and disposable capital, are exposed in Fusco's play as essential to the execution of Duncan/Horton's act.

By failing to take into account the sociopolitical conditions in which the act is able

to occur, by refusing to examine the power relations which privilege aesthetic intent over the dignity of particular bodies, Duncan's act reinscribes a dominant patriarchal discourse, despite his claims to the contrary. *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* raises a critical voice against this kind of art which explores the 'limits' of the privileged human body for lofty, transgressive aims. With her version of the performance, Fusco not only dismisses the validity of the artist in question (and others like him), she also eschews the notion of art as an autonomous act: she criticizes representation which 'pushes the boundaries' without regard for human dignities. Fusco calls attention to those artists whose work perpetuates notions of 'other' by engaging in acts which contain and violate that body. She drives home how inconsequential these 'restrictions' are compared with the economical, social, and political limits imposed upon the subaltern female body.

Thus, while able to exert a degree of control over the realities of the characters on stage, Fusco's on-screen characters remain in a realm that is fittingly inhuman. The characters and action on screen are distinctly separate from the women, and the interaction between the two parties is thus an indirect one at best. Fusco highlights the inability of the digital revolution to foster genuine human relations, and exposes its capacity for dehumanizing members of the virtual class. As the on screen characters and the live actors are contained in two separate realities, the ability of either party to view the other outside of these constructions is remote. The result of the 'interaction' is a perpetuation of the trafficking of human bodies and identities and the reinscription of the notion of 'other' on the non-white body.

Importantly, however, Fusco does not close her play down in a fatalist manner. We should recall that once each woman has told her story, the diorama represents a personal experience of disappearance. In effect, the Latinas usurp the purposes of the

diorama by imbuing its meaning with alternative realities, and Horton and his intentions are overshadowed by their voices of anguish and indignation. As Spivak maintains, in order to disrupt the cycle of colonial discourse, the witness must not only find moments to listen, he/she must clear a space for the subaltern to speak (*Can The Subaltern Speak?* 111). By inviting her audience to engage the three different dioramas, Fusco has asked her spectators to provide this space, and the women in her play thus acquire the agency of 'rewriting' the narrative. The play itself, however, recognizes that such space is not spontaneously or miraculously created. Just as the repercussions of a colonialist history cannot correct themselves with the passing of time, the consequences of Horton's artistic decisions have not become less malignant after twenty years.

This is made evident in the final tableau of the play: "*[The women] sit on the table and wrap the sheet around the three of them and hover together, as lights fade*" (220). All three of the women in the cadaver's sheet appear as inconsequential as the mannequin they have replaced. The play, complete with unhappy ending, thus demonstrates particular realities for the subaltern women in the advancing digital age which no small gesture can subvert or rectify. The implications of Horton's act have been made tangible to the audience in three distinct and horrifying ways, and the women's stories stand as testament of living as the disappeared/dead. The horror of Horton's performance achieves such a distinct level of reality that the women's performative bodies cannot possibly revoke the exploitative violence of the act.

In *The Incredible Disappearing Woman*, Fusco explores some of the grim conditions imposed upon the subaltern female in the global market. She examines unequal power dynamics in the digital age through many different sites, and demonstrates the complexity of the issue by refusing to propose a simple solution. By referencing an actual

act of 'performance art' Fusco exposes those artists who perpetuate hegemonic discourses against peripheral bodies and identities, and challenges practitioners of her own medium to be accountable. She reveals various discourses which have been erased from representation by providing a subversive space for her women characters to speak their unspeakable stories. As such, Fusco confronts her audience with their own culpability in fostering the deadly power imbalances of the developing information age which force the subaltern body to disappear into the realm of the dead.

Notes

[1] The In Transit Festival is a "process oriented series of events, conceived as an on-going laboratory, focus[sing] not on finished products but on encounters between 130 performance artists, musicians, theatre and video artists from Africa, Asia, the Arab world, Europe and The Americas" (*www.in-transit.de*). The TBA Festival "brings together a remarkable group of artists from around the world for ten days of thoughtful, innovative, inspiring performance that address the cultures, aesthetics, issues and ideas of today" (*www.pica.org*). The performance was entitled *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* but is not synonymous with the play script I will be using. Fusco rewrote the play last year and "can't change the title for a number of reasons that have to do with funding and programming" (Fusco, email correspondence). It is crucial to note that I will be examining only the play script for this chapter.

[2] The term *maquiladora* refers to the assembly plants in free trade zones, nicknamed *zona de la muerte* in the Dominican Republic: "death zones" (*Bodies* 195)

[3] Fusco uses the term 'virtual class' to refer to developed world inhabitants who have unrestricted access to the technology of the digital age.

[4] One example of this argument can be found in "Cultural Imperialism on the Internet" by telecommunications PhD candidate Seongcheol Kim (Michigan State). Though Kim admits that "90% of traffic world wide on the internet is in English" he also maintains that "[g]eographical locations are irrelevant in cyberspace" since "everyone on the Internet becomes a potential communicator of ideas. . . . Instead of the 'one to many' communications model, the Internet allows 'any to many' communication with a relatively low barrier to entry" (*www.interculturalrelations.comv 1;4Fall1998/f98kim.htm*). That the "relatively" low barrier to entry contradicts the "any to many" communication claim does not seem to concern Kim.

[5] Fusco's piece responds directly to the unsolved murders of dozens of women which have plagued residents of Juárez since 1997.One of the world's largest border cities, Juárez is located in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, directly across the border from El Paso, Texas.

[6] Performance artist John Duncan (1953, Wichita, Kansas) is "widely recognized for his work in performance, music, and installations based on emotional responses to sensory deprivation and stimuli. Duncan's events and installations, often known to involve rendering participants completely nude and blind, have recently been held and shown at Ars Electronica, the Watari Museum of Art in Tokyo, and Lucia A-Go-Go in Stockholm" (<*www.touch.demon.co.uk/Biographies/johnduncan.html*>).

[7] All quotes describing the set or indicating character dialogue are taken from the playtext as it appears in *The Bodies That Were Not Ours and Other Writings*. The location of the quote will henceforth be denoted by page number only.

[8] As we have seen in chapter one, 'otherness' equates with a particular homogeneity. While Magaly is Chilean and the corpse has been identified as Mexican, the dominant reading of 'other' in this instance would likely not allow for a differentiation between the non-white bodies, thus reiterating the assumptions inherent in Spivak's "Can The Subaltern Speak?" which indicates that the subaltern subject must forever contend with the phallologocentric assumption of cultural homogeneity among a heterogeneous group.

[9] "Little macho man". All translations of Spanish are guided by the *Oxford Spanish Dictionary. 2nd Edition*. Eds. Carol Styles Carvajel, Micheal Britton, Jane Horwood. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.

[10] It is logical to assume that the castrated artist Horton refers to is Rudolph Schwartzkogler of the Viennese Actionists, whose obsession with ritualistic practice as performance art eventually led to his demise at a very young age. Much controversy surrounded the 'performances' of the Viennese Actionists, and Schwartzkogler's aesthetic was undoubtedly the most sensational of the four members. The referent piece, which purports to explore the boundaries of life and death in regards to the human body, is reminiscent of Schwartzkogler's fixation upon transcending the limitations of the physical body.

Green, Malcolm, ed and trans. *Brus, Muehl, Nitsch, Schwarzkogler: Writings of the Vienesse Actionists*. London: Atlas, 1999.

[11] Hennessey explains, "Women provide most of the world's socially necessary labor-- that is, labor that is necessary to collective survival-- but much of it is rendered invisible, both in and outside the value system of commodity exchange" (6).

[12] Loosely, "joe boy", as in "lackey".

[13] "Like a Barbie!"

[14] "Like a crazy person".

[16] "Insolent!"

[17] "Daughter of a whore!"

[18] Jeffrey S.J. Klaiber, *The Church Dictatorships and Democracy in Latin America* (New York:Orbis, 1998) 53: "The DINA, reinforced by paramilitary groups that acted with impunity, continued to detain all persons who voice their opposition to the regime, some of whom simply disappeared".
Also see Patricia Verdugo, *Chile, Pinochet and the Caravan of Death* (Miami: North-South, Center 2001) for a recount of the history of the Pinochet regime.

[19] "Pretend you're a dead woman".

[20] "Dog (bitch)".

[21] Fusco breaks with this convention just once: "*(Projection of Chela running outside in the dark wrapped in a sheet, low light, shot from a moving car that starts from behind her and ends ahead of her, speeding away.)*" (212).

[22] In the 1980s, BLIND DATE was met with such resistance that Duncan left the country, "claiming that he was the victim of rabid feminists" (*Bodies* 196). In 1998, however, the records of this controversial performance were unearthed by a Los Angeles museum for a major exhibition. As Fusco explored this administrative decision as well as the original controversy surrounding the piece, she found varying voices of dissent and support. While some witnesses indicated that the artist's ability to execute his act raised certain ethical concerns about Mexico in general, others simply rejected the controversy and any questions regarding the ethics of the piece (196).

Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West, Better Yet When Dead, and *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* are indicative of the intentions of Fusco's oeuvre which examines notions of identity and attempts to subvert the meaning that is demarcated by 'otherness'. Jean Fisher contends:

> in speaking from within a number of identificatory positions that reject or parodically manipulate the fixed stereotypical identities assigned as 'other', [Fusco] inevitably engages in a war of positions with hegemonic culture, transgressing those boundaries that it erects to keep the subaltern in her place and confirm its own authority. (223)

Significantly, Fusco's efforts to construct a representational space for the subaltern outside the hegemony of a dominant discourse were driven by a personal response to her subject matter (*Bodies* 188). This indulgence in subjectivity falls within what many critics consider a *passé* and therefore ineffective aesthetic. Fusco observes, "Since the backlash against 1980s' identity-based art exploded in the early 1990s, the artworld has grown increasingly hostile to the deployment of personal experience as aesthetic or political gesture" (*Bodies* xiv). While Fusco herself condemns the "emotional striptease" (xiv) inherent in identity-based art, her pieces prove that the use of individual experience does not necessarily negate artistic integrity or resistance against hegemonic discourse.

Indeed, the fact that the referents in Fusco pieces are actual events and individuals demonstrates a particular virtue of Fusco's work. The containment of the 'other' in a process of fetishization is shown in all three to be indicative of present material conditions facing the subaltern body. In *Amerindians*, Fusco references an historical practice, and her ability to engage her audience in an 'uncanny' encounter demonstrates

that the collective unconscious "remains inscribed by a psychic investment in colonial relations" (Fisher 223). In *Better Yet When Dead* Fusco exposes the necrophilia of contemporary celebrity culture which contains Latinas in an eroticizing gaze by implicating her audience in the veneration of their deaths. *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* speaks to the repercussions of the information age on the subaltern body, and by referencing an actual art exhibit, Fusco illustrates how the subaltern female literally disappears in the commodity logic of intercultural exchange.

Significantly, Fusco's living dioramas facilitate a particular positioning of the spectator in her aesthetic which implicates that spectator as voyeur. This spectator/spectacle relationship necessitates a critical engagement with the issues Fusco foregrounds if the spectator hopes to eschew the notion that his/her presence is an affirmation of the fetishization of the subaltern. In *Amerindians*, Fusco's Third Space challenges and subverts a dominant reading of the non-white body, encouraging the spectator to examine the 'authenticity' of his/her perceptions. The interactive *Better Yet When Dead* demands that the spectator reexamine his/her participation in the wake and relationship to the deceased if he/she hopes to avoid being implicated in the necrophilia inherent in the aesthetic. And, by forcing the audience to witness intimate moments which disclose stories of anguish, *The Incredible Disappearing Woman* asks the audience to examine the material conditions which are concealed in the representation of particular female identities in the digital age.

Performance theorist Peggy Phelan states "Visibility is a trap . . . it summons surveillance and the law, it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperialist appetite for possession" (*Unmarked* 6). As such, representation continually runs the risk of reaffirming discourses that illegitimately categorize, stereotype and restrict particular

bodies. Fusco's ability to negotiate this trap is demonstrated as she reformulates the visibility of the non-white body, indulging the gazes Phelan identifies and dismantling the discourses on which they rely. Fusco is the first to admit that her work "can't solve the problems of the world" (Weatherston 124), but that nonetheless, she strives to "offer people a space in which to reflect upon [those] problems" (124). While this thesis has explored Fusco's efforts to create that space, it has also shown that her performance pieces offer more than an arena for contemplation; they continually stimulate reflexive emotion and defy expectation and in so doing, reformulate meaning. Her dioramas blur fiction and reality into the indistinguishable, and her carnivalesque and evocative style ensnare the spectator in a complex exchange between 'self' and 'other', unsettling the assumptions upon which these distinctions rely.

Fusco's ability to represent the bodies and identities that are absent from dominant discourses demonstrates how performance can be an effective method of resistance against that 'trap of visibility'. Fusco makes clear that recognizing that the personal has a critical stake in the politics of representation can formulate engaging, articulate, and subversive performances. Her unique blend of theory and practice position her as a noteworthy contributor to critical discussions on the pervasiveness of marginalizing discourses within academic and artistic pursuits. Fusco's ability to reposition the subaltern outside her/his dominant classification demonstrates her successful use of performance as a method of protest against hegemonic discourses which privilege the Western gaze. Fusco's mastery of engaging critical issues within her aesthetic affirms that her future representations will continue to eloquently and poignantly expose illegitimate acts of epistemic violence toward subaltern bodies and identities.

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